EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER LIFE.

EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER LIFE:

LESSONS FROM

ITS DUTIES, JOYS, AND CONFLICTS.

A SEQUEL TO "THE SOUL'S LIFE."

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PREFACE.

THE frequent requests made for the perusal of certain sermons have induced me to issue a second series, and to arrange them as a sequel to "The Soul's Life." More than twenty years have elapsed since that volume was published, and it has attained a larger circulation than I ever expected. I have reason to believe that it has been of use in many cases, and I gratefully acknowledge the honour which it has pleased God to put upon me in condescending to make use of any words of mine for the great work of His Holy Spirit. To that volume the present Lectures are a supplement or complement. They follow in somewhat of the same order, with this difference, that the subjects are confined to the experiences of the soul subsequent to conversion. Here and there references may occur to those who are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenant of promise;" but for the most part they are directed to the establishment of faith and to the quickening of hope and love in those who have already become members of the family of God. The point of view adopted throughout is also introspective, as is natural

in the later years of a ministerial career, when the course of the blood is calmer, and the flush and energy of early manhood have been succeeded by the maturer thoughtfulness of later years.

I am far too profoundly conscious of my own personal deficiencies to assume the position of a Master in Israel. I regard myself as a learner in the School of Christ, and my mental attitude is that of one who is looking out for God to teach him, by whatever agency He may be pleased to use. Many of the most precious lessons of my life have been acquired from the lips of the poor and the unlearned;—unlearned, that is, in the world's scholarship, though highly advanced in the lessons of the Spirit of grace and truth. I am conscious that of some parts of the great domain of revealed truth God has given me a vivid apprehension; on other parts I am conscious of being less clear, and I want to be taught. Should it be thought inconsistent that I should issue, under such circumstances, a volume on Christian experience, I can only plead that I have made no attempt in these Lectures to dive into the unknown, and have only dealt with lessons verified in the experience of my own soul, and confirmed in the biographies of eminent saints, at whose feet I am thankful to sit and learn.

One thing alone I venture to claim: it is that no experience will be found to be recorded in these pages which is not founded on a dogmatic basis, and does not spring of necessity out of some positive doctrine of the Word. The attempt to sever the sphere of

emotion from that of intellect, the sphere of experience from that of faith, appears to me to be eminently dangerous, and to be as unphilosophical in its principles as it is wholly unscriptural in its application. That God should deal in one way with the understanding of a man and in another with his heart, is simply incredible. For, as God is one, not many, so man is one, not many, and his whole constitution must be dealt with harmoniously. The feelings in the heart of man can only be trustworthy so far as they correspond with the promises of the truth of God. The moment the correspondence ceases they lose their Divine sanction and become simply human, as unreal, as unstable, and as unsatisfying as all human things are. Such a religion is apt to resolve itself into a mysticism without foundation, without definiteness, and without strength. I do not deny that considerable advance in the spiritual life may co-exist with indistinctness, or even with error, on some points of doctrinal truth; but, in that case, the inner life is fed by what it has, not by what it has not; by the truth it clearly holds, and not by the defective apprehension of other truths not clearly seen. I do not wish to tie all Christian experience down to the mere terms of theological propositions; but from the great distinctive doctrines of the Word of God I believe it to be inseparable and indistinguishable. All attempts to sever religion from theology, religious affection from religious truth, are to a great degree the result of ignorance and of a careless use of words. We may

as well expect the human body to maintain its colour, form, and activity without the solid framework of bone which constitutes the human anatomy, as expect a healthy religious sentiment to survive the loss of sound doctrine. It is from the truths apprehended by faith that hope is fed, and that love is winged to take its eagle flight heavenward. Truth, whether apprehended by the understanding or embraced by the affections, must be as one and indivisible as the God from whom it comes. Whatever other defects may be found in these Lectures, and doubtless they are many, it will not be found that the experience described in them has ever lost its foothold on the promises of God and the wondrous work of redemption accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I humbly commend this volume to the grace of my Master, and am assured that if it shall prove to be of the slightest use to any one, the work will be altogether of Him and not of me, and to Him shall be the praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever.

EDWARD GARBETT.

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EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER LIFE.

I.

THE SENSE OF SIN ENNOBLING.

"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."—JOB xlii. 5, 6.

THE conception which we form of sin must largely affect our estimate of the religious wants of the day, and our conception of the mode in which Christ's Gospel must be employed to meet them. For human sin is the prime fact with which the Gospel deals, and to which all its provisions of grace are adapted. Whatever estimate we form of it must, therefore, necessarily extend throughout the whole of our religion, both doctrinal and practical, just in the same way, to use an analogy frequently found in Scripture, as our estimate of a bodily disease affects the nature and extent of the remedy by which we seek to cure it. Enlarge your estimate of sin, or depreciate it, and you either raise or lower in the same degree your estimate of the Gospel, alike as regards the work of atonement accomplished by

the Lord Jesus Christ in His life and death, and as regards the work of conversion and sanctification by the Holy Spirit of God.

The importance of right conceptions of this first fact of all the facts of religion is, therefore, exceedingly great. Nor can we be unconscious, that the general estimate of human sin falls much below the positive language of the Church. The Ninth Article of the Church of England asserts sin to be an inward corruption of nature, to be universal, to be hereditary, to be so extensive that human nature is very far gone from original righteousness,. and to have such moral guilt about it that in every man born into the world it deserves God's wrath and damnation. To the general mind of the day such language appears excessive and overdrawn. With the merely theological question I do not propose to deal. I address myself only to the general sentiment, for it may often be an instinct of natural pride, rather than a deliberate conclusion of the understanding, which is out of sympathy with the doctrine. Nor do I propose to enter on any elaborate statement of the Scriptural evidence in support of the doctrine, but only to speak of the fundamental conception of sin which lies at the bottom of the popular objection. The objection appears to be threefold. The doctrine of the utter corruption of human nature offends self-respect, and is thought not only to lower, but even to degrade the man, of whose faith it forms a part. Then, extending this feeling from the individual to mankind at large, it is

supposed to affront the conscious dignity of human nature, and the nobility of the soul of man. And further extending the thought from ourselves to the scheme of God's saving love towards us, it is thought to deprive the Gospel of its genial beauty, and to make it harsh, distasteful, and unloving.

With the object, lying at the bottom of these difficulties, I entirely sympathise. We need to raise the individual man, not degrade him; to strengthen, not to weaken, the nerve of his true self-respect. We need to make men understand that human nature is a great and noble thing, even in its ruin; far too great and noble to find its satisfaction in anything short of God. We need to give prominence to the beauty of the Gospel, and commend it to the admiration and love of mankind. But the estimate of sin implied in these difficulties is, I believe, a profound mistake. The idea rests on a radical misconception. I maintain that a true doctrine of sin elevates the man, not degrades him; that the sense of sin is a sign of strength and knowledge, not of weakness and ignorance, exalting human nature, and making it greater alike in the memories of the past, the magnificent hopes of the future, and the condition of the present. I maintain that it gives loveliness and glory to the whole Gospel scheme, and invests it with a captivating power over the human heart otherwise unknown. With the Bible in my hand I cannot see it otherwise, and I pray for the help of the Holy Spirit of God that I may

explain simply and concisely my reasons for this estimate.

I.—In the first place let us look at the sense of sin in the individual. Let us place into as sharp a contrast, as our personal experience may enable us to do, the two states of the man, converted and unconverted: the state, in which he thought that nothing was very seriously wrong with him beyond a little moral infirmity natural to man, and had no consciousness of a deep-seated and fatal disease; and the state, in which he feels his need of a Divine Physician, and, conscious of his unworthiness even to approach God, smites upon his heart, and cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Let us put the same man in the two states sharply into contrast, and let us ask what is the difference that has been made between them.

I reply, in the first place, that the man has lost nothing except his pride. No diminution of any good has taken place in him; no aggravation of any evil. He has not deteriorated one whit since the change. He is not less strong, less honest, less truthful, less brave, less reverent and conscientious than he was before; nor does he in the least profess to think that he is. Measure him by his fellow men, and he is exactly to-day what he was yesterday; or, if he be otherwise, it is that he is conscious of a new strength and higher impulses than he knew previously. What, then, has taken place? He has lost nothing, I repeat, except his self-satis-

faction. But he has gained. He has gained a new ideal, a higher conception of moral goodness, a loftier standard by which to measure himself. The sense of sin exists in the interval between what a man is and what he ought to be; and it is evident that the more you raise the "ought to be," the greater will be the distance by which we fall short of it. Is not the man richer, nobler, greater, happier,—a higher being altogether for the new conception that he has gained?

A man grows into his aims, and rises or sinks with them. It is one of the most familiar facts of daily experience, and holds good in every sphere of action. Take the artist, the musician, the poet, what is their effort but to give shape and form before the eye or the ear to the ideal existing in their own imagination? The man satisfied with his own work never can be great. Is it not notorious that as he advances in skill he becomes more critical and difficult to please, and sees defects in work, on which perhaps, years before, he looked with complacent satisfaction? Whence this sensitiveness to fault? Has he lost his skill of eye and hand, his sense of beauty and form, or colour or harmony? Not in the least. He has simply grown, and as he has grown his conceptions have grown. Let any one compare his work as a *man*, with his work as a child, and he will smile at the difference. And it is just the same with the conscience, as it is with the intellect. The same laws pervade all our nature. The man who

has acquired a sense of sin has simply grown. He has lost nothing, but he has gained—has gained a new conception of holiness. The facts concerning himself remain what they were, but his thoughts have soared into a higher sphere, and he has breathed a purer atmosphere.

But how has this conception been gained? The text gives the answer. For this reason I have taken the words, not as a study of the life of Job, though even thus they are intensely interesting, but as an illustration of a universal spiritual process. The soul of Job, when he uttered them, was filled with deepest humiliation; so intense, that he could scarcely find language to express it. It arose from a sense of unworthiness and guilt, moreover, which he had not felt before; for otherwise he would never have uttered the complaining words, or expressed that estimate of God's unkindness, which gave occasion to the discussions of the book. This prostrate self-humiliation was new to him, and how had it been gained, but from the fuller sight of God? He gained, as I have said, a new conception. He knew of God before, and worshipped Him. But he saw Him distantly and dimly, just as we may know a person of whom we have heard, but with whom we have enjoyed no personal communication: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear." But now there had flashed upon his soul an actual vision of God: "Now mine eye seeth Thee." The words express inward sight, not outward. The narrative

records: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." But there is not a syllable to indicate any visible manifestation of the Deity. It was the same sight as that with which Moses saw "Him that is invisible."

We must all be conscious, that there are special moments in life when the veil of the other world seems thus to be uplifted by the hand of the Holy Spirit, and through the "rent curtain" of the seen the soul perceives God so close and near that we seem to stand face to face with Him. What had been to us little more than a name, or a vast and vague abstraction, becomes all at once a living Person. The occasion may widely vary. It may be an illness, an accident, an open grave, an awakening text, a word dropped from a child's lips, or a silent communing of the heart with itself at some midnight hour when everything has slept save the conscience within us. But there can be few who have not experienced such a sight of the Deity at some time or other.

So Job saw God. It is remarkable that he saw Him mainly in His immensity and sovereignty, for to these, rather than His moral attributes, the words of God refer. This opens a psychological question, which I must not touch. But Job saw God. And surely that sight was a gain, not a loss; a sight that ennobled, not lowered; an honour, not a humiliation. Yet in that sight Job saw the infinite distance between God and himself; and hence the cry, most true, I believe, to the experience of every real Chris-

tian man: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes."

II.—As the sense of sin in the individual implies a gain and not a loss, and therefore elevates—not degrades; so when we look to the aggregate of mankind it suggests a lofty estimate of the grandeur of human nature, and inspires a hope of its final glory not otherwise attainable. If sin be the corruption of the nature of every man born into the world, then it is not the accident of the individual, but the property of the species. The human nature is a fallen thing, sadly different to what it was when it came first from the great Creator's hand, the finite reflection of His own infinite perfection. No doubt there is humiliation in the thought compared to that scheme of belief which traces him back to a primeval savage, and represents him as ever climbing by his own unassisted strength higher and yet higher in the scale of humanity and honour. But it is great to know the truth, and if the fall be true, it is strength to recognise it and learn its lessons.

It must be admitted that there are in man many things which point to this conclusion, and show that both he and the world in which he lives are out of joint together. What contradictions there are in man himself, what a strange mixture of strength and weakness, nobility and meanness, intellectual power and moral degradation, thoughts

that soar throughout the universe, and affections that grovel helplessly here below, earthly and earth-born! What a strife in himself—his reason and his conscience on one side, and his inclination and habits upon another; his lofty pride, and yet his bitter self-dissatisfactions; his complacency, and yet the remorse that eats out his heart and cankers all his life! And as it is with himself so it is with the world in which he lives; the beautiful and the terrible, the gentle and the stern, light and darkness, smiles and tears, life and death, are side by side everywhere. Surely it is a world in ruin. Man himself is like a stately palace in ruins, made for God, but deserted by its Divine Inhabitant, and only here and there showing traces of the exquisite beauty of the past; and the world outside, lying under the curse, resembles a landscape, all desolate and lonely save for the prowling robber or crouching beast of prey, but once rich with waving harvests and musical with the sound of happy labour.

Now, observe, if it be not so, if human nature be not fallen, then all its sins and sorrows are an essential part of itself, and never can be otherwise. Then man was made thus; and if so made, what hope is there that he can ever be changed, ever be different?—the thought falls like a chill on all the heart's hopes. But observe also, that if the Bible be true, and human nature be a fallen and ruined thing, if it once lived with all that now makes it great present, but all its contradictions and conflicts and weaknesses absent,—a grand and noble thing that even

the Creator saw to be very good ; if this be true, then these things are no part of itself, but may all be removed, and redeemed human nature may stand again before God in such regenerated beauty that the Lord Himself shall be admired in His saints and glorified in all them that believe. For here there is room left for a redemption, and I ask you to notice that the extent of that redemption must necessarily correspond to the extent of the fall. If human nature as it is be but a little fallen, then it can be but a little restored. Then all that can be done for us will be but little better than our present state after all — but the clearing away of a cobweb, or the strengthening of a mouldering buttress, here and there. But if the fall of human nature has been great, then its capability of being restored must be great also. Then the glorious predictions of the Bible may all be true, and the time may not be far distant when a redeemed and glorified humanity shall be presented before the world, the wonder of angels and the praise of eternity.

Now, then, compare the two views we have taken of human nature. Remember that whether you think it has fallen a little, or whether you think it has fallen much, the facts of its actual present condition remain the same. If you say that it has only fallen a little, you do not make it a bit better or holier than it is. If you say that it has fallen much, you do not make it weaker or more corrupt. The nature is the same in either case, only with this difference : that the doctrine of the fall lays stress upon the soul

of man—that inner spiritual self which was made in the likeness of God, which will live for ever and ever, and contains in its own being a whole world of joy or sorrow. Say, which is the loftiest, noblest view of human nature; that which tells you that it never has been and never can be much better than it is, or that which tells you that it was once a holy and spotless thing, and that, through the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit of God, it may be in us all a holy and spotless thing again—body and soul sinless, sorrowless, deathless, made "like unto the angels," to bask in the beatific vision of God for ever and for ever?

III.—Lastly, the doctrine of sin gives such a height and depth of glory to the Gospel, as it can possess in no other way. From this alone we understand the occasion of the Gospel, and see the necessity for it. We must adequately appreciate the facts to which it is adapted, before we can appreciate the scheme which is adapted to them. It is so with the individual sense of sin. It is only the sense of sickness that brings us to the physician, only the consciousness of a complete moral need and state of condemnation, and of our own utter impotency to satisfy in ourselves the justice of a holy God, that brings us to the Saviour, and teaches us to cling to His cross as for very life. It is so with the ruin of human nature at large; for if it was not complete, there was no need of the Divine compassion, and all the

Gospel plan schemed in the eternity before time, carried on in signs and wonders and miracles during time, and to be completed in the eternity after time, becomes no more than a causeless display of Divine attributes. The adequate reason for it is absent.

Moreover, as the greatness and value of a remedy can only be commensurate with the evil that it cures, so to lower the estimate of sin is to lower all the marvels of salvation and bring down the mystery, into which angels desire to look, to the dimensions of a petty human scheme. Say that human nature is but a little changed from what God made it, and is still a beautiful thing in itself, like a jewel that needs but a hand to brush away the dust in order that it may shine in all its intrinsic worth—then where is the marvel of God's love to us? where the length, and depth, and breadth, and height of that love of God when He spared not His Son? It is gone. For if human nature be beautiful, it is natural that God should love the beautiful. The wonder is that a holy God should love a ruined, guilty, sin-stained world—love it out of the spontaneousness of His own Divine heart. Say that sin is but small, and its guilt in the sight of God but trivial, a natural weakness, and not a guilt deep and black as hell, and you take away the glory of the Son of God and tear from the bleeding brow of the dying Saviour His diadem of honour. Say that the corruption of the heart of man lies only on the surface, that his will is good, that he is able to turn to God and do so much for his own

salvation that only a little help is needed, and you dispense with the operations and office of God the Holy Ghost. The doctrine of spiritual regeneration is destroyed.

The experienced trials and sufferings of the Christian life become equally inexplicable. Why this battle to fight, this race to run, these enemies to conquer? why these prayers and strong supplications, these cries and tears of souls wrestling with God for peace? why this stir and effort, this conflict between the Church and the world, these deaths of martyrs, this burning zeal for souls? why these ordinances and sacraments, this broken body and shed blood of our Lord? Why all these if sin be a slight thing, the fall of man a myth, and the eternal loss of souls an idle dream? The man who is not conscious of a deep corruption of heart and a state of utter guilt before God, may well look up and wonder what it all means. To him there is no occasion for it; and feeling this, it is but natural that he should pull down the greatness and the mystery of the Gospel to his own thoughts, and make them all human as himself. But to the man who knows the plague of his own heart, mourns over his sins, and shivers in conscious helplessness before the judgment-seat of God, to him every doctrine is an intense and glorious reality, and as he lies and weeps before the cross, and lifts up his eyes amid his tears to the suffering face of Jesus, divinely beautiful even in its anguish, the voice breaks on his ear like a song of

everlasting praise—"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Let me not be mistaken. I do not say that sin is a good or noble thing, or that any consideration whatever can mitigate its unutterable evil. I only say, that the facts being so, the knowledge of sin and the sense of it are essential. Without it we shall never come truly to Him who holds the key of the house of David, that opens the door of heaven. The man who lowers his estimate of sin makes a profound mistake, and only exalts himself to degrade alike his nature and his hopes in the deeper debasement and the more irretrievable ruin. The sense of sin is like a prelude to a song of triumph. The accents of contrition as we breathe out our penitence into the ears of God swell into the hallelujahs of redeemed saints—"All we like sheep have gone astray," but, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and blessing."

II.

THE ABIDING WITNESS.

"And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."—1 JOHN iii. 24.

SOME persons crave for Christian assurance under a mistaken apprehension of its nature. They seem to regard it as something over and above the ordinary processes of grace, and discomfort themselves on account of the supposed absence of what a clearer experience shows that they already possess. Assurance is not a gift distinct in itself. The assurance of faith is simply an exalted and confirmed faith, and rests therefore on the promises which are the common foundation of all faith. Assurance of hope is simply an exalted and confirmed hope, hope in an intense state of exercise, and it is built on the same evidences, and directed to the same objects, as all other hopes.

There are persons, on the other hand, who shrink from the name of assurance, and repudiate the thing as if it were arrogant and presumptuous. The mistake probably arises from the extravagances of what is sometimes called assurance, when men use language fitted for heaven but not for earth, for the

perfected state of the saint hereafter rather than for his imperfect and struggling state here; or when men dissever assurance from its evidences, and make it to be a mere conviction of the mind devoid of solid proofs. Such extravagances lead some devout but imperfectly-taught Christians to shrink from assurance altogether, and to dislike the very name. There lies, however, at the bottom of this mistake a want of clear perception that the work of God in the soul is all of grace, and of grace alone. If our salvation were our own work, or if it were half our own work and half God's work; if our own wisdom, strength, or righteousness had anything whatever to do with the meritorious grounds of our acceptance, the scruple would be a just one. But the work is altogether God's work, completely His, in what is wrought in us as well as in what is wrought for us, so completely His that our power to believe, accept, obey, is wholly the work of His grace. Hence to doubt the full completion of the work is to doubt God, not ourselves. The greater sinners we feel ourselves to be, the greater may be our confidence, because it was to save sinners, such as we feel ourselves to be, that the Son of God came into the world. It is this sense of sin, and this emptying ourselves of ourselves which is the work of grace, and therefore the witness of our acceptance. Discarding every shred of self-reliance, we trust the more because the work is all of God, and because neither His love, nor His wisdom, nor His power can fail of its complete accomplishment.

Rightly understood, therefore, assurance is the mother, not of pride, but of humility; not of careless temerity, but of holy fear; not of self-exaltation, but of self-abasement, the more lowly from the very contrast of our own wretchedness with the dignity of our Saviour and the magnificence of our salvation. Hence, in Scripture, we find both truths maintained side by side. What a wondering sense of the saving love of God is there, for instance, pervading this chapter, from its opening exclamation, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," down to the self-examination taught in the immediate context. And yet what full and sweet assurance lives and blossoms side by side with it,—nay, rather grows out of that soil, is watered by these tears, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." It is the same in the words of my text: "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."

Let us maintain the close connection of the words with each other, and look devoutly to their lessons.

I.—The first lesson they convey is the dignity not only of the state of the saint, but also of the evidence by which he is assured of it. This state consists in the abiding presence of God; and this not only above us, though this is true; not only around us, though this is true; but *in us*. On this

amazing fact John repeatedly dwells, as if his very sense of its wonderfulness made him the more anxious to reiterate the truth over and over again, and thus to assure us that he is using no figure of speech, but asserting a sober reality. Four times in the succeeding chapter he repeats the assurance, "God dwelleth in him." We must neither pare down the literal fact of this indwelling, nor must we forget the majesty of the Indweller. The fact is attested in other parts of the Word as well as here. Our Lord Himself gave the promise of it: "If any man love Me, he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make our abode with him." St. Paul repeats the assurance to his Corinthian converts: "Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." The majesty of the Indweller is the majesty of God.

He who is Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent;—the Creator who called this world into being, poising the solid globe upon nothing, and stretching overhead, like the curtains of His tabernacle, the far-reaching heavens with sun and moon and stars to do His will and sing His praise;—the Preserver, who maintains it in being, and whose own life pervades His creatures from the flower glistening like a gem to the forests on a thousand hills, from the mote dancing in the sunbeam to the Mammoth and the Leviathan;—the King who rules and governs us, and who, throned above the water-floods, makes

even the wrath of man to praise Him;—the Judge before whose tremendous throne we shall hereafter stand to give an account of the things we have done in the body;—that God who is Indivisible, who cannot be separated into parts, but is everywhere at once, the whole Deity with power and wisdom, majesty and truth, with every attribute and glory complete;—He, He Himself, dwells within the saints. He dwells—not flashing a ray of His glory now and then, breaking the natural darkness of the soul for a moment, and then leaving it again darker than before, but abiding there, *dwelling*—like the sun in the heavens, with His beams hidden, it may be, sometimes with earthly clouds and mists, but like the sun behind the clouds filling the soul, as in ancient times He filled the material temple, with the glory of His presence.

Such a fact must appear to us very wonderful, and the more wonderful the more we think of it. It is not the association with our weakness and littleness which amazes me; for I can understand that all things are little to Him who called them into being, and that they cease to be little when He is present with them. I can also see that a living intelligent soul is a more precious and beautiful thing in itself than any material temple, even though the skies be the throne and the earth the footstool. But it is the association with our wickedness that amazes me—that the holy, sin-hating God should dwell in such hearts as ours.

Yet let us take care not to mistake this matter.

Let us not dream that God dwells in the soul where sin dwells, as if God and Satan could divide the empire and sit side by side. Oh, no; not in that sin-loving heart, with the stains of the world thick and foul upon it—not there does God dwell. Within such a soul there is not a spark of indwelling Deity. The cleansing blood of Christ must be sprinkled upon us, and in that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness must we be washed from the guilt of sin: the quickening power of the Holy Ghost must have descended upon us, as when the fiat went forth, "Let there be light, and there was light;" and must have dispelled the darkness, broken down the strength and taken away the love of sin, before this state can be ours. But even when this is done, the motions of sin still remain. Sanctification is so imperfect here below, our strongest faith so feeble, our brightest hope so dim, our most fervent love so cold and selfish, our waywardnesses and inconsistencies so many, that it is wonderful that God should dwell within such hearts. Yet, child of God, it is the sober literal fact.

What a difference it makes in our estimate of life, and in our calculation of human happiness or sorrow to take this into account. Here is the true standard of dignity and honour, here the true test of human happiness. Hast thou, or hast thou not—God? Hast thou God? then art thou rich and noble. Poor, it may be, in worldly goods, low in station, uneducated in earthly learning, struggling for thy daily bread, and like thy Master, a man of sorrows, yet if

thou hast Him within thee, thou art high as the angels and glorious as the heavens. The Deity abides with thee, and thou, like a smiling land, dost bask in the everlasting sunshine of His love. Hast thou not God? then rich in worldly goods, high in station, clever and learned in human wisdom, possessed of all earthly things, yet thou hast really nothing;—poor indeed, since in thy void and empty soul there dwells no heavenly inhabitant. All other differences are comparatively lost in this. Dost thou dwell in God, and God in thee?

Truly, in answering such a question we need clear and indisputable evidence. And God has given it us: "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us." The words should run, "by the Spirit whom He hath given us." Otherwise they may seem to mean by "Spirit" the tone and temper and disposition of the inward man. But this they do not mean. They denote the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and of holiness, the Comforter, Himself God, blessed for evermore. "Hereby know we that He abideth in us, by the Spirit whom He hath given us."

II.—With this dignity we must combine the definite clearness of the test, which proves our possession of it, for we might otherwise find great difficulty. We might say that the Spirit is an unseen agent, whom the eye cannot perceive nor the hand touch; an invisible Being, whose very name of "Spirit" or "breath"

broken down, and what remains are the motions of a disobedient slave, not the tyrannies of an acknowledged master. Every day brings its struggle, but brings likewise its victory.

Further yet, this Christian obedience is not partial. The word itself implies obedience to an external law; for what a man does out of his own will is preference, not obedience. Christian obedience accepts and follows the whole law. It does not pick and choose what it likes, and do that, while it leaves the rest; but it submits to the whole of it, and has its distinctive mark in bringing particular temptations and special sins into captivity to the law of Christ. Here, then, are the evident witnesses of our state. The Spirit, who cannot be seen, works in an obedience that can be seen. To this test, if we would enjoy the full blessedness of our hope, let us bring ourselves; not to particular acts, but to the whole current and character of our lives. "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."

III.—The words express the infinite blessedness both of the state and of the evidence. It is possible that obedience may seem painful to some persons, so that their hearts shrink back with a natural dislike from the authority implied in God's command over them, and from the struggles and self-denials implied in obedience. To me the idea of a command and of obedience is blessed, because it marks out a Divine and unerring path amid our human perplexities; but to

some I know that it is painful. I fully admit that if Christian obedience were an outward and compulsory thing, bringing by mere force the unwilling heart into subjection to the letter of a law, it would be painful. But it is not this. Christian obedience is a willing, loving, generous thing. The old man of the flesh will indeed rebel against it, and (as we must all be conscious) self-pride, self-indulgence, and self-inclination stand up in opposition. But while the flesh rebels, the spirit rejoices; while the old man opposes, the new man of the heart loves and obeys. The whole regenerated self, the renewed will, the enlightened conscience, and the affections captivated by the beauty and the love of Christ, are all for it, not against it. Its seat is inward, not outward. It is a law working from within the soul itself, not a compulsion from the outside. It is not like a stream of water thrown from without upon us, but like a living fountain springing up within us,—"a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

And why is it this, but because it is the Spirit's work, and because God abideth in us? For God is the source of life, and when He dwells within the soul He dwells as the spring of life, and every pulse of that life is love and every thrill of it joy. Is there not always joy in life? Is there not joy in nature's life, as, bursting the chains of death-like winter, happy creation breaks into beauty, and flowers, and fruits, and trees, and birds sing together? Is there not joy in human life when, fresh and sweet as a spring flower,

the buoyant child laughs, and sings, and plays? Is there not joy in the sense of life, and only so far pain in it as the mortality of a fallen nature interrupts it with the seeds of decay, and clouds it with the shadows of death? And is there not joy in the life of the soul, since it is the very life of God fresh from the indwelling Deity, as if He became a part of ourselves and filled us with His glory?

Answer the question, ye who know God, and know what it is to abide in Him and He in you. Tell, each of you, amid the circle of your friends, of the joy of the Divine life, and let that joy find its living reflection, its abiding witness, in your character and conduct. Then shall the world be compelled to see the beauty of holiness and to recognise the Gospel, not alone as the greatest and most necessary of things, but as the sweetest and best of things, the only abundant fountain of human happiness below. Hence flows the peace of justification, when the burden of sin has been thrown off and laid upon the shoulders of the Sinbearer, and we can look up to the Holy One and call Him Father. Hence the calm repose of a soul that has found God, and to whom, within the secret place of the Almighty, the storms of the world die away upon the outside and never break the holy joy within. Hence a sense of noble self-respect, as in the presence of God, we feel the true dignity of man, and, raised above old and selfish motives, learn to live worthily of our heavenly calling. Hence love, deep and fervent, and drawing out of the very consciousness

of our human guilt and helplessness the strength of its happy self-dedication, as it gives itself back adoringly to the Saviour who first gave Himself for us. Hence hope, rising eagle-winged into that which is within the veil, and, in the daily experience of the bliss of having God within us, learning to measure what heaven will be when we shall be with God for ever and drink for evermore the rivers of His love.

These are the joys of the Christian, the loftier heights of the mountain of the Lord, reaching above human thought into the skies, but having solid foundations here below, unfailing evidence in the practical details of life as we echo the apostle's words — "He that keepeth His commandments, dwelleth in God, and He in him; and hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us."

III.

THE GREAT POSSESSION.

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."—HEB. viii. 1.

THESE words are intimately connected with the context which has preceded. "We have such an High Priest," such, that is, as the apostle has described in the preceding chapter. We are therefore thrown back for the interpretation of the text on what has gone before. That we may understand it and see its bearing, it will be well that we should briefly recall the general object of the Epistle itself. There can be no doubt, from the whole line of its argument, that it is directed to comfort the hearts of Jewish converts to Christianity under the difficulties of their position. The extraordinary tenacity with which the Jew clings to the religious privileges of his nation is well worthy of attention. The wrench must consequently have been tremendous when, on becoming a Christian, he lost his hold on the ancient traditions, and found himself outside of the law which had hitherto been his very life and hope. His exclusion from the visible temple, his loss of the material sacrifices, the absence of the

splendid outward ritual, must all have been severely felt. This Epistle was consequently written for his comfort, by pointing out that all the visible grandeur of the Temple service was but typical, and representative of heavenly realities, and that if he lost the outward shadow, it was only because he had passed beyond it into the possession of the Divine substance.

The course of this argument leads the writer, I believe St. Paul, to draw a comparison between the earthly and the heavenly priesthood, which is summed up in the text. For in all the Mosaic services, the prominent living figure was the priest; and all the splendour of court and altar, all the pomp of colour and music, were but the subordinate accessories of his work. The priest stood full in front, in the midst of it all. The consciousness of sin, which the sacrifices and offerings tended to keep alive in a sensitive conscience, increased the reverence with which his office and his person were invested; for to the ancient Jew the priest was the official mediator between him and God, through whom alone the stricken sinner could approach to the Holy One. The priest was everywhere in the law, and, with the exception of God Himself, almost everything. Above all, conspicuous in superior dignity and honour amid the other priests was the High Priest. In the ordinary duties of the priesthood he only took part on special occasions. On his head alone was poured the sacred oil of Divine

consecration. To him belonged a peculiar dress, for of the eight priestly garments prescribed by the law, four were peculiar to the High Priest; and when arrayed in the full robes of his office, with mitre, breastplate, and the Urim and Thummim conspicuous amid the blue and purple and crimson and gold of his other raiment, he must have presented a splendid spectacle. To him alone it belonged to enter into the Holy of Holies, the very immediate presence of God, once a year, to make atonement for himself and for the people, putting off his splendid vestments when he entered in, but assuming them again before he came forth into the sight of the congregation. All the sanctities, all the awful solemnities, all the exclusive privileges, all the highest comforts and hopes of the Jew met in that one figure—the High Priest.

But after all he was but typical. He did but represent Divine realities, in the same mode as we represent to children by means of pictures what they could not otherwise understand. All the state and splendour of high-priestly office could not hide the mortality of the dying man, who filled it. But the High Priest of the Christian covenant is the Son of God. The colours and embroidery work, and jewels and gold of the priestly vestments did but typify the beauty and perfections and various offices of the sinless One. That atonement, with its yearly repetition, did but prefigure the sacrifice accomplished once for all, and once for all offered by the "Lamb of God who taketh

away the sin of the world." The shadow was on earth, but the reality is in heaven, as much greater and nobler as the heavens are higher than the earth. That human priesthood — weak, transient, subordinate—we have it not; but the eternal reality we have. "We have such an High Priest."

I.—Let us look at the reality of the fact. "We *have* such an High Priest." It is not a matter of useless desire or of future hope, but of present accomplished possession. The truth exists indeed in the unseen world, and is not at present visible to sight, as it will be hereafter. Hereafter the very eyes shall take cognisance of the fact, when forth from the Holy of Holies, the immediate presence of God, the great High Priest shall come to be manifested before the eyes of an astonished world. Just as the High Priest of ancient times came forth from the inner tabernacle into the presence of the congregation in all the renewed splendour of his office, so the Lord Jesus will come forth again clothed in the majesty and glory, the dominion and universal empire, which belong to Him as the crowned Messiah, and the "King of kings and Lord of lords."

But for the present He is within the veil, and we cannot see Him. He has been seen by human eyes to enter into it. From His cradle to His resurrection we are enabled to follow Him in the sacred narratives. We see His holy life, we hear His words such as never man spake, we behold His

miracles, we adore before the spotless holiness of His life and the beauty of His character, we are admitted to see something, amid the gathering darkness, of His agony in the garden, when the weight of the world's sin lay heavy upon Him. We trace Him to His cross, and sitting down beneath the gloom of the mid-day darkness watch His dying agonies. We hear His last cry. We see the lifeless body taken down from the cross and laid in the grave, amid the tears of those who thought that they were burying their hopes as well as their Master. We wait and watch with the soldiers, and share in their astonishment when, on the third day, the stone was rolled away with a great earthquake, and the Lord of glory rose again. We watch Him as He appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, and with the assembled company of the believers, we follow Him with our hearts as He rose up into heaven and was lost to human sight amid the clouds of glory. That ascension was nothing less than the entry of the great High Priest into the Holy of Holies. Here indeed sight fails; but faith can see Him even there, with the self-same scarred brow and pierced hands and wounded side with which He rose. It is but for a time that He is lost to sight, and then He will come forth again, and "every eye shall see Him, and they that pierced Him: Even so, Amen."

But why is that time delayed? Why lingers the great High Priest within the heavenly sanctuary? The answer is, that He waits till the number of the

elect shall be completed, and the intercession which He for ever lives to make for His people shall be no longer necessary, when, His people being gathered safely in, the last veil shall be for ever removed from between them and the full sight of God. Our High Priest still ministers for us till then. Let us take care not to mistake the nature of His ministry. The sacrifice of His own Divine Self has been made once for all; nay, more, it has been *once for all offered* as well as once for all made. You will find that this Epistle is at least as emphatic in asserting the oneness of the offering as in asserting the oneness of the sacrifice. We need to bear it in mind, that we may not be misled by the unscriptural notion of a continued oblation of Christ to His Father. Grave men condescend to play upon words like children, and, because the sacred emblems of the Lord's supper are a representation of the broken body and shed blood of our Lord, they call it a re-presentation; which involves a totally different idea. Even our Lord in heaven is not continually offering over and over again the sacrifice of Himself to the Father, for by "one sacrifice, once offered, He hath perfected for ever those that are sanctified." Our Lord's attitude in heaven is not that of kneeling, not of standing, but of sitting. "God hath set Him," *made Him to sit* "at His own right hand." "Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." The phrase is reiterated over and over again. Atonement is not an incompleted work which is still being done, but one which has been

done, and done for ever. It is not atonement, but intercession, that still continues, and that is ceaseless—has never ceased since He rose—will never cease till the last soul of His flock has been safely gathered in. Why look for grounds of acceptance elsewhere? Sinners indeed we are all, but sinners for whom the Son of God suffered, bled, and died. We need faith to grasp its reality and rest on its Divine completeness. Glory be to God, "we have such an High Priest."

II.—The words affirm the singleness of the Person, and of the office He fulfils. "We have such an High Priest,"—not many, but one—one, and only one, so absolutely alone, that it is blasphemy to arrogate any part of His work. We know that there are teachers, who assert that even the ministry of the Christian Church is a true sacrificing priesthood, and are not afraid to speak of exercising by delegation the office and prerogatives of Christ Himself. I am not about to argue at any length about this, nor to do more than merely repeat in passing the familiar but most important fact, that there is not one solitary passage in the whole of the New Testament Scriptures in which the word which denotes sacrificing priest is ever applied to the Christian ministry; just as you may search the Prayer-book of the Church of England from end to end and never find the word "altar," for it has been carefully removed; and though the word "priest" unhappily remains, it is priest for presbyter, and not priest for sacrificer.

But I do not mean to dwell further on these familiar topics. I only wish to point attention to the one fact that the priesthood of Christ makes any other priesthood impossible, simply because He fulfils the office Himself. Who shall dare to do what Christ is doing, and what room is there for human priests, when the Divine Priest ever liveth? It is as if a man brought a wretched taper to help the light of the noonday sun. Shall we venture to say that there is defect in the accomplishment of His work, and that men are needed to supply it? or that there is anything man can do, which Christ does not do?

Such a supposition is not even mentioned in this Epistle, as if it were too profane and blasphemous even to be considered. Is it sacrifice we need and some expiation for sin offered to the justice of the Holy One? The great High Priest has made it in His own suffering and death. Is it the oblation of this one sacrifice before God? The great High Priest ascended into heaven to make it. Is it the presentation of our prayers to God? The great High Priest ever lives to make intercession for us,—the "one mediator between God and man." Beneath the blaze and glory of His work there is room for no other. Who shall dare to strip the priestly vestments from the shoulders of the Son of God and place them upon man? It is so certain that while Christ is Priest no other can be priest, that the apostle does not even condescend to notice it. But will Christ be Priest for ever? This the apostle notices. Yes, for He liveth in "the power of an endless life," and

needs no successor. Under the law there were many priests, because of death; for one died, and another took his office; but Christ liveth ever—"death hath no more dominion over Him, for in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God." Therefore the apostle declares it to be an unchangeable priesthood, one that never can be transferred from Himself to any other, for such is the emphatic meaning of the word "unchangeable" in the twenty-fourth verse of the seventh chapter. Take a firm and strong hold of this truth, that there is one Priest, and there can be only one, when one does all, and does it for ever. "We have such an High Priest."

III.—But, lastly, the words call attention strongly to the perfection of the high priesthood of Christ, and the perfection of Him who fulfils it. "We have such an High Priest." Turn back to the preceding chapter, and you will find that the apostle enumerates beauty after beauty in Christ, as if he were gathering together a cluster of jewels to deck His crown of glory. It is singular, when we read the passage carefully, how we find it crowded with insignia of honour. In human priests, if the most extravagant claims were admitted, it would yet be true that the dignity is only in the office, and not in the men. For when men exaggerate the office, as when, for instance, it is said that the priestly consecration can annex the very body and blood of Christ to bread or wine; or that the priest can instru-

mentally forgive sin in the very place of God, or can open and shut, by the administration or by the refusal of the sacraments, the gates of heaven and hell, they only throw into greater contrast with such enormous claims the weaknesses and ignorances of the sinful, dying man. The disproportion between the office and the man is actually immeasurable.

But when we turn to the true High Priest, how different it is! Here is not only the glory of the office, but the glory of the Person, infinitely qualified in His Deity, to stand between the justice of God and the whole human race. He is no mere dying man like an earthly priest, but clothed with "the power of an endless life." He was not made after the law of a carnal commandment, but made after the oath of God Himself, "a High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec." He has not entered into the "tabernacle made with hands, with the blood of bulls and goats," but with "His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." He is not one among many, like earthly priests, but is alone in His own single and unequalled majesty, "the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." He does not fill a delegated office, like earthly priests, but fulfils His own office, and that so perfectly that He "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." He needs not daily, as earthly priests, to seek forgiveness for His own sins, but is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." He does not minister afar off from God,

like earthly priests, but is already "made higher than the heavens," and at the right hand of His Father pleads evermore for us. He needs not to repeat His daily offerings, as earthly priests, but has made atonement once, "when He offered up Himself." And, lastly, He has no infirmity, like earthly priests, but is the *Son of God*, Himself God, blessed for evermore—omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite! Who perfect as He? and what wonder that, thus perfect, He should govern as well as atone?—not only Priest, but King,—nay, bearing on His head the triple crown of glory—Prophet, Priest, King.

Is He not glorious? then with what implicit confidence should we not trust our souls to Him! Is He not glorious? not with vestments of human making, crimson and blue and purple, that catch the eye with their tinsel; but in the beauty of His person, the perfection of His offices, and the wonder of His work! glories that fill the soul with adoration and heaven with praise. And should it be, that any soul is abashed by this very height of glory, and dares not to approach so great a High Priest, let us remember that He is as infinite in sympathy as He is perfect in holiness—God, yet man like ourselves. "We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Let us therefore come boldly to the throne—come for pardon, come for peace, come for protection, come for sympathy, come for help here, and for glory hereafter, "since we have such an High Priest."

IV.

THE COMMON BOND.

"Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."—ROM. xvi. 7.

THERE are few chapters in the New Testament which appear less inviting than the one, in which these words occur. It looks like a mere list of names, of which nothing certain is known, and which are therefore devoid of any appeal to our sympathies. Yet closer examination and more thought correct this first impression, and show that the chapter, when carefully studied, is really full of interest and instruction.

It contains a list of salutations from St. Paul to friends at Rome. To the Roman Church at large the apostle was at this time personally a stranger. They had never seen his face in the flesh. Some, however, were his kinsmen; others he had met in the course of his laborious life and ministry. Many were familiar to him by reputation, though he had no personal acquaintance with them. But to all and from all he had affection to give and to receive. The passage furnishes an interesting illustration of the Christian love of those early days, and how the

Gospel knit men's hearts together across the earth at a time of the world's history when the intercourse of man with man was small, and travelling dangerous, laborious, and slow. Yet the number of names mentioned shows how largely, even then, the tenderness of Christian love could draw heart to heart, and unite even personal strangers in a true brotherhood.

It is also impossible not to be struck with the courtesy with which all these messages are expressed; the gentleness and simplicity which pervade the whole. There is a little kind word for every one, perhaps simple, but evidently perfectly sincere. An unaffected humility breathes throughout the entire chapter, in the true spirit of that affection which in honour preferreth one another. Thus he speaks of the devoted affection of Aquila and Priscilla, who had laid down their necks for him. Thus he salutes Epænetus as the first-fruits of Achaia, and Mary as having put him under much obligation for her kindness. Thus he salutes Andronicus and Junia, who had been prisoners together with him, and who were superior to him in one respect and held a position of yet higher honour than he,—"Who were in Christ before me."

The ground of this superiority is well worthy of our study. It shows us that the true source of honour is not in a man's circumstances, but in the man himself; not in the head, but in the heart; not in gifts, but in graces. We must be conscious of the tendency to feel and think otherwise. Who is it that we most delight to honour? Is it not the rich man,

or else the clever man who delights us with his wit and humour and the sparkle of his conversation, while we pass over the poor man, or the quiet man, perhaps with a glance of contempt? It is thus in every rank, from the drawing-room of the noble to the workshop of the artisan. We are taken by what is glittering and showy, however false and unreal it may be. The cold and hollow heart, and perhaps the base and selfish temper, may lie below the smiling lip and the ready tongue; but we are attracted by what seems fair and smooth, without heeding the hypocrisy or the corruption within. What thousands of young persons have been deluded by a fair outside!

It ought not to be so. All is not gold that glitters. We need to look for solid worth, above all for that good which the Spirit of God works within a man, and to love it for the sake of the God who works it. So it was with St. Paul: he puts a crown of honour on the head of Andronicus and Junia,—and what was it but their grace? No doubt these two saints had done many a noble thing for Christ's sake and the Gospel's sake; for St. Paul says that they were "of note among the apostles." But here was the honour which made them greatest in his eyes—"Who also were in Christ before me."

On this phrase, "to be in Christ," let us now fix our thoughts. There can be no doubt that it describes the condition of a saved man. Thus in the eighth chapter, the apostle declares,—"There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Several

different phrases are used in the Word to express the union of a sinner with the Saviour, and they all express some special aspect of the common hope. May the Spirit of God graciously enable His people to understand and to appreciate them!

I.—The phrase "in Christ" implies the attainment of safety in Christ. The language is founded on the idea of a refuge, as if a man surrounded with foes and in danger of his life should fly to some stronghold, and be in safety. Such an idea was especially familiar to men of other days, and it occurs with great frequency in the Book of Psalms, and in all the prophetic scriptures. In ancient days every man's hand was against his neighbour. Countries were divided among a number of petty kings, just as was the case in the feudal times in our own land, when every baron lived in his own armed castle, and sallied forth with his retainers to carry violence and blood on every side. Men then banded themselves together for defence, and built themselves walled cities, within whose solid gates they could defy attack; or they erected smaller fastnesses within easy reach of the husbandmen that tilled the land, that at the cry of danger they might fly to them and defy the marauder.

Let us picture to our mind's eye that group fleeing to the stronghold. Look how they strain every nerve to reach the sheltering walls, while behind there thunders down the foe to cut off their escape, if possible. See, see! that flying woman has paused to

look back, or to gather up the goods which she cannot bear to lose: see! see! that man has delayed too long or perhaps disbelieved the warning; and now the foe is on them, and it is too late: the fatal sword does its bloody work. But see on the other side these fugitives have gained the tower and are safe, safe in the fort, just as in yet earlier times the eight were safe in the ark amid the world of waters; they are saved, and the baffled foe turns back, like a chafed lioh disappointed of his prey. So it seems to be here. A man "in Christ" is safe within the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice, beneath His arms who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. In Christ he has full pardon for sin through His blood, full acceptance in His righteousness, full conversion and sanctification by His Spirit; in Him, redemption, pardon, life; but out of Him, condemnation, sin, death. It is just thus that St. Paul speaks of the absolute safety, pledged even by the oath of God Himself, of those who have "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

Recall the illustration I have suggested of the group of fugitives and the pursuing foe, and the watchman upon yonder tower crying the alarm, just as, amid a careless world, the preacher of the Gospel lifts up his warning voice and speaks of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come. It may be that the devil attacks you with some strong temptation, and would entangle you in some fatal sin which will hold you back from hope and God. It may be that God has visited you with

solemn convictions, and you know not where to find peace. You may feel your sins taking hold of you, more in number than the hairs of your head, and your heart may fail you. It may be that life is slipping swiftly by; health failing you as one infirmity after another warns you of your mortality; death drawing near with that tremendous prospect of judgment that lies beyond; and you, whither shall you look for help? There is but one safety, one refuge; one, where the power of sin will be broken off your neck; one, where the tormenting sense of guilt will be removed by the atoning blood of Christ; one, where grey hairs and declining life will cease to alarm you, where death itself will lose its fears, and the coffin and the grave will become but the threshold unto glory. That refuge is in Christ. Oh, that men would fly to Him, while they may! What matters it, if we reach Him like a bleeding fugitive, weary and panting, if only we reach Him? What matter the effort, the tears, the conflict, if we are safe, safe at last, safe for ever, safe in Christ?

II.—The words "in Christ" imply union with Christ. Here the living idea which naturally occurs is that of a vine branch, living by union with the root and partaking of its life, just as our Lord said, "Abide in Me. He that abideth in Me, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Here we take a step farther than mere safety. There are some who think the whole of religion to consist in the mere escape from hell, the mere absence of punish-

ment; or, it may be, the addition of an endless bodily gratification. There are some who have no idea of heaven, beyond that of merely bodily pleasure. Such notions are most unworthy. It is not from the punishment of sin alone we need to be saved, but from the stain of its pollutions, all those degrading influences of the flesh and of the transient and perishing world, which make us unfit to be admitted into God's company and deprive us of the joy of His face.

We have already considered the idea of flight and of escape; but let us not think that this is all. We have not only something to escape, but something to gain. Religion has its own delights; yes, and however hard it may be to persuade men of it, just as it may be hard to persuade a blind man of the beauties of the visible world, or to convey to a deaf man the charms of music, they yet exceed all other pleasures a thousand times over. Oh, would to God we could persuade men, that religion is not only a thing necessary and a thing right, but a thing beautiful and blessed, a thing to be sought for its own sake, realising all those joys which men blindly seek in the world, and seek in vain, for all pleasures of sin are but delusions that vanish away and perish in the using. There lives not a man on earth, who has enjoyed in sin the unmixed pleasure he expected from it. To say that there is happiness in sin is as much a lie out of Satan's mouth, as to say that there are gloom and sadness in religion.

Why, what is religion but life? and life is joy. There is joy in the state into which we enter when

we become children of God, and look up to the great Being who made the heavens and the earth and all things therein, and call Him with happy confidence, "Our Father, which art in heaven." There is joy in speaking to Him, joy in trusting Him, joy in throwing our weary hearts upon Him, joy in praying to Him, joy in worshipping Him, as the heart melts into tenderness, or is lifted up on the strains of some grand hymn, as if with eagle wings, towards the throne of God. There is joy in the soul itself as new feelings and affections, new hopes and emotions, come thrilling into the heart, when the Spirit of God quickens it into life. There is joy in the possession of the present and joy in the prospects of the future, when we remember that, come when death will and where it will, by sudden accident or by slow disease, on the waves of the broad sea, or on the quiet sick bed, there remains another and an endless life. It is not all over with us when we die; the best is to come in the cloudless heaven prepared for those who love God. Not even angels can fitly tell, nor heaven ever measure out, the peace that passeth understanding. But all this is in Christ. The very life is His life, and it is only by our union with Him that we possess it. He lives, and therefore we live, if we are one with Him. "Because I live ye shall live also." This is life, and happiest is he who lives it longest. Every day out of Christ is a day lost; every day is a day gained, a day of hope and peace and happiness, which is a day "in Christ."

III.—To be "in Christ" implies the rest of the soul when it has found Him, and the satisfaction with which it dwells content in Him. Here we have another idea, the idea of search. Like the merchantman in search of goodly pearls, we look for the object of our desire in every direction, and pursue eagerly our search till, in some happy moment, we find the precious thing for which we are seeking, and then we rest. How different the satisfied peace of the man who has found, to the anxious restlessness of the searcher! Thus God Himself could use the idea, "The Lord thy God will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in His love." So David says, "Rest in the Lord." Who knows not how largely the sense of expectation pervades all our lives! We are ever looking forward, ever wanting this or that, something else, and still one thing more, always something, which we are pursuing.

To those who watch their own hearts this absence of rest in the present, this searching ever into the future, will appear not a little remarkable. Why is it, but because we have not got that which fills and satisfies the heart? There is a sense of want, a void place in the soul which craves for supply; and never, no not though all the riches and pleasures of the world were ours, never shall we find peace till it is filled. The reason is that we are made for God.

It would be as easy to satisfy a man with the playthings of a child, as to satisfy with things mortal and perishing a soul that is immortal and

which will live for ever. We search and we try, and we are disappointed. How often in common life we use the phrase of a person or of a thing that has disappointed us,—"I did not find what I expected in him or in it?" But we may find all in Christ. Who ever heard a Christian complain that the Lord had failed to satisfy his desire, or that the Saviour was not more beautiful and blessed a thousand times over, even than he expected? Oh then, in life's weary race, we can rest when we find Him; rest from all the torture of our uneasy conscience on His perfect righteousness; rest from all the struggles with sin on the victory of His sanctifying Spirit; rest on the certainty of the care with which He watches all His people's wants and provides for them; rest on the pledged assurance of His final triumph; rest on the pleasure of communion with Him here; and hereafter, when the earthly struggle is over, and the last sigh has been heaved, and the last pang borne, and the last tear shed, rest for ever where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest." Happy soul who has found salvation, life, rest, and all in Christ! Out of Christ, or in Christ,—which is it? In the world and out of Christ, or out of the world and in Christ? How high a dignity, how Divine a life, how full a satisfaction is described in the apostle's words "in Christ before me!"

V.

THE INWARD WITNESS.

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son."—1 JOHN v. 10.

IT is necessary, for a proper understanding of the great truth declared in these words, that the relation in which they stand towards the context should be borne in mind. For the inward witness to which we are taught to look as the God-given testimony to the faith we hold, is not itself the reason why we believe, but is the effect of believing. It is the seal which a loving personal experience places on the Divine character and the suffering of Christ, as sufficient to meet all the soul's wants. In the previous part of the chapter, faith is first described as the great victorious principle which overcometh the world; with such an intense vividness does it present to the soul the great realities of the world unseen, that in comparison with it the most pressing interests of the seen and temporal become comparatively unimportant. But we must have intelligent grounds for believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and these God has supplied to us in "the Spirit, the water, and the blood." By the

Spirit I understand the inspired teaching of the Holy Ghost about Christ; by the water the purifying effects of the Gospel; and by the blood the atoning work accomplished once for all upon the cross for the sins of the whole world. These make up God's witness, and appeal is made to our common rules of action to accept this testimony to Jesus. We receive the witness of men, and how much more should we receive the witness of God, who is greater than men, when He appeals to our reason and our conscience with the same kind of evidence, only incomparably stronger and more conclusive, as that on which we are accustomed to rely in all matters of earthly belief? This is the witness of God, by which He has testified that He hath "given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

We believe, then, because we accept God's testimony. Believing, we come to Christ, and now we test and prove Him for ourselves in a way we could not do without belief. For faith is the soul's eye to see Christ, the soul's hand to take hold of Christ; and till we see Him and grasp Him we can no more know what He is than a blind man can judge of the landscape he does not see, or a deaf man of the music which he has no organ to enable him to hear. A personal experience therefore, then, cannot be without faith. And here is the reason why men make such strange mistakes about Christ, and think Him harsh, severe, and unkind,

and so shrink from His side, simply because they do not know Him. If you want to know His beauty and blessedness, do not go and ask yonder stranger to tell you, but go and ask yonder saint, who has known Him, loved Him, and tried Him for years, and who can speak from personal experience. In what words of deep affection and holy confidence, with what admiring, adoring, constraining love, will not the lips of the saint tell of Him!

Is not this natural? Some friend tells us of a precious medicine; we believe his word, and, believing, try it ourselves. Experience tells us that all he said about its virtue is true. Or we hear of some marvellous scenery: we believe, and, going to see it, we are enraptured with it ourselves. Or on a journey we have a trusty and faithful guide recommended to us: in our confidence of the recommendation we engage the guide, and find him to possess all the qualities we needed. Is there anything fanatical or unreasonable in such cases? First comes the act of faith; then it is followed by experience; and experience, in its turn, itself supplies a new testimony to faith. So it is with our souls and Christ. Experience is no more fanatical here, than it is anywhere else. We have believed God's testimony to His Son. Believing, we have tried and proved Him, and now we know Him to be a precious and most blessed Saviour. As well tell me that I am not alive, with these pulses beating in my veins meanwhile; or that I do not see the landscape stretched before my view; or that there is no music when I

hear the sound thrilling sweetly in my senses; as tell me that that is not true on which my soul lives, that Saviour not good and precious, who has saved me by His blood and quickened me by His Spirit! I know it, because I have proved it. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."

I.—The nature of the witness must be first ascertained. The illustration suggests that the witness must be something clear and definite, and capable of being ascertained beyond doubt. We appeal to a witness to make some matter clear and certain, which would otherwise be obscure and doubtful. If the doubt we desire to remove extends to the witness, we are as far off from certainty as ever; the witness must itself be beyond suspicion. Is there anything in Christian experience found to exist within ourselves which answers to this character?

Many men are disposed to ridicule the idea that there is, and to regard it as mere fanaticism. They point to the mistakes and errors that men daily make, and especially dilate on the uncertainty of all feeling and personal conviction. Belief necessarily has a power, they say, because it is belief, wholly irrespective of the question whether it is a belief in what is true or in what is false. In support of this they point to the diverse religions there are in the world, and to the bodily pain and privation which the fanatic Hindoo or the savage fetish worshippers of Africa, or the turbulent Moslem are prepared to make for their religion. And then they turn to the diversities of opinion

existing among our own people, to the sturdy yeoman leaving land and home under the influence of Mormonism to find a heaven in the Far West; to the preacher of a fanatic Spiritualism; to the power which Popery exercises over the intellects and wills of its disciples; to the diversities of opinion and system even among Protestants. Such men cannot all be right, and yet all are equally confident in their separate beliefs. How worthless, it is said, must personal earnestness and conviction be, and how dubious a guide, when every monstrous folly under heaven can claim it with the same right and plead it with the same confidence.

I have stated the objection fully and fairly, because we are not afraid of it. Simply and by itself mere conviction may be uncertain, but it becomes a very different thing when we have reasons for it, and these reasons are confirmed by experience. One point of view is supplied by the text. The effects which Christianity produces in and on the heart, and which become to us the very voice of God speaking within, are not any effects or every effect, changeful as the wind that blows, and various as the morning shadows that chequer heaven and earth. But they are certain, distinct, and definite effects, which are the same in all men. They follow a precise rule and order. They are effects not natural, but contrary to nature; they mortify pride and break down self-will and contradict all the instincts and affections of unconverted human hearts. Last, not least, these precise

effects are definitely revealed in the Word of God. The Bible tells us beforehand, that whenever Christianity comes in its power to the human soul, it will work in it these precise results, and no others.

They are the more remarkable, because the Gospel does not stereotype all men in the same rigid mould. Men do not lose their personal peculiarities when they become Christians. Varieties of taste, character, temperament, gifts, intellect, and disposition all remain as before. Among the sacred writers themselves no two prophets, no two apostles, are alike, even in their style. Among ourselves how familiar to us is the same fact. One Christian is sad and desponding, another cheerful and sanguine; one hot and energetic, another slow and inactive; one stern or demonstrative, another tender and affectionate. Religion does not cast us all in the same mould, and fix us thereby. Yet amid all these varieties it does produce the same effects on all men, and stamp upon every converted soul the same lineaments of the Saviour. The beings themselves are different, but the inward experience is everywhere similar. The witnesses are still the same, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

First of all there is the conscious experience of a new force acting upon the soul, a new life circulating in every faculty. It is not simply a higher measure of what previously existed; as when the body, conscious of life, of sense, of feeling, and of motion before, yet acquires them, through more perfect

health, to a higher degree than before. But it is motion and life, where there were none previously. An intense consciousness of the soul's being and preciousness, making its interests the absorbing thought, has now taken the place of previous indifference. This force is not temporary, coming and going like a shadow—a flash of emotion like the lightning, gleaming for a moment and disappearing again; but it is a steady influence which, so far from wearing out, rather increases, and becomes more and more predominant. And all this, the man is conscious, is no work of his own. He has not sought it, or desired it. It has come without effort of his. He is not, therefore, deifying himself, but bows his whole soul before another power, revealed from above. Every pulse of this new life, its objects, ends, influences, are witnesses that its seat is not in nature, but in grace; that it is not by flesh and blood, but wrought by the living Spirit of God.

Secondly, this new inward force is connected invariably with a certain belief, which gathers round one unchanging form,—the form of Christ upon His cross. It is not only true that the man who experiences this quickening looks to the atoning blood as his ground of hope; but it is also true that no man is ever thus quickened, or professes to be conscious of any such change, who does not look to the atoning blood. The Christ who has made peace by His blood, and the Spirit who draws the soul to Him, are inseparable; for, as the Bible tells

us, part of the office of the Spirit is to witness to Jesus. The meritorious work of the Saviour is felt to meet the soul's wants, and His righteousness to give the soul peace, in a way that nothing else can do. This, too, is against nature, for it involves a sense of the most absolute sinfulness and helplessness in oneself, and sole and undivided trust in the righteousness of another.

Nor is even this all. For this power and this belief do not operate on the feelings alone, though this they do; nor upon the affections of hope and fear and love and desire alone, though this they do; but upon the whole springs of the heart, the character, and the life. The man is changed, and changed in the one direction of holiness. His very thoughts, wishes, opinions, and pleasures have all undergone a total alteration, as broad as between light and darkness. What once he loved, he hates; what once he hated, he loves. He has got out of his old self and its wretched selfishness into a higher being. The purifying water has touched the conscience and the heart, and made them clean and Christ-like—the holy reflection of a pure and holy Saviour.

These definite effects are wrought all the world over, in every saved man, Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free. The effect is described beforehand in the Word; and so absolute is its identity everywhere, that converted men in every land and every age, become brothers, have the same thoughts,

are moved by the same hopes, sing the same praises, breathe the same prayers, rest on the same promises. There is nothing like this elsewhere. Surely it is of God. Happy the man who knows it in the living experience of his own soul, and can say, out of the facts of personal knowledge, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."

II.—We must glance at what it is that the witness proves. There must be some definite truths to which the witness testifies, or else what is the use of his testimony? We have the witness in ourselves. But to what?

First it is to the reality and solemn greatness of the world unseen—the soul, sin, the Saviour, God, heaven, and hell. The quickened soul actually sees and touches these things with an intensity so truly equal to that of bodily sight, as to leave the relative importance of the two words to their proper and natural value. So long as our sense of the seen world is more vivid than of the unseen, the seen will affect us more than the unseen, in spite of the enormous preponderance in the value and duration of the latter. But the two being seen with equal vividness, the one with the eyes of the flesh, and the other with the eyes of the soul, the majesty and greatness of the unseen at once preponderate and become absolute. That man has risen beyond outward evidence, and needs no other testimony, who feels God in his own soul, and lives in communion with the unseen.

Then, it is a witness to the truth of Christianity. For the man has tried it, and proved it to be what it professes to be. His peace of conscience, his childlike love, his purified and heavenward affections, his enjoyment of prayer and praise, his daily victories over the snares and temptations of the world, his deep calm peace, his absorbing love for Jesus, and that unutterable feeling and sense of His nearness and presence which no words can describe, are like so many angel hands, to point to Christ—so many angel tongues to sing His praise—so many angel messengers to bear His promises of peace.

Then, it is a witness to the Divine authority and power of the Word of God. For such a man opens his Bible, and finds there the living mirror of himself. His hopes and fears, his trials and conflicts, his joys and sorrows, his very temptations and sins are all there, in its blessed pages. The Word reveals to him himself, that inward book of which every man needs to be a prayerful student; and the knowledge of himself reflects back the wisdom of the Word. The Spirit in the written Word, and the Spirit in the living soul, are two strains of the same music, two pulses of the same life, two utterances of the same voice; and they cannot be separated.

Lastly, it is a witness to our personal acceptance before God. It is the witness of the Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are indeed God's children. For whence comes this inward life, this Divine force which works upon the soul? Whence this vivid sight of the cross, and the new and higher

life filling the soul once dead in trespasses and sins? Whence come they, but from God? They are His voice, and that the voice, not of an avenging Judge, but of a gracious and reconciled Father.

Is not the witness clear and distinct, when the change between the man that was and the man that is, is so great and vivid? A man may as well be unconscious of some sore sickness, and of his recovery from it, as be unconscious of his conversion. A thousand arguments matter not to him. He answers to them all, as the man born blind answered to the Jews, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

Have we this inward witness? I know not which man is most to be pitied, the man whose soul is altogether dead, and who feels no life and hears no voice within him, or the man who has some notions, some convictions, sufficient to condemn, but not sufficient to save. Wretched, indeed, are they both. For the one is dead; and what life the other has is only like the life of the sick, all delirium, pain, and suffering. Happy only is he, whose intellect and heart have both alike been taught of God—who knows the truth, and loves what he knows. He, amid all human controversies, has his feet upon the Rock, and rejoices in a faith that has soared beyond the region of mists and doubts, into the calm sphere before the presence of God. He believeth on the Son of God, and "he that believeth hath the witness in himself."

VI.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."—Rom. xiv. 12.

THESE words assert with great precision individu al responsibility. It is not the fact of a future judgment in itself, nor even the principles on which it will be administered, on which I would fasten attention primarily (pregnant with thoughts of the utmost possible solemnity as such a subject is), but the personal nature of the judgment. Two verses before the apostle had affirmed that "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." The words call up before the mind the amazing spectacle of the universal judgment, when all the human race shall be gathered together before God, —a company that no man can number. We seem to see the great white throne, the Judge seated on it, the attendant armies of the angels, and before it the crowds of the risen dead stretching on and on as far as the eye can reach.

The sight is imposing, and grand to the highest degree. And yet there is danger in contemplating it; for the spectator may imagine that in so vast a number he will be individually lost, just as even in the

crowds of the living busy world single individuals pass unnoticed in the throng. It might be supposed that individual escape was possible; or that, if each one is to be judged, he will be judged in the mass, classed together with others of similar religious character, and sentenced in a group. Such a conception is possible, and the apostle, guided by the Spirit of God, proceeds therefore to correct it. For whereas in the tenth verse mankind are spoken of as a whole, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," in the present verse each individual of the whole is particularised in one strong phrase, "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." We must all be conscious that this picking out of individuals, this dealing in judgment with each separate soul according to its special history, makes the judgment incomparably more awful, and brings home the impression of it to each one personally. For not only does it imply a closer act of scrutiny which shall lay bare to the conscience itself, as well as to the assembled universe of spectators, the nature and aggravation and abominableness of each several sin, but it also individualises the shame and confusion of face, which will belong to the wicked in that day, and which will be but the expression of the conscious self-convicted guilt within.

This, then, will be the nature of the future judgment. We shall not be judged all together, but separately, and I can well conceive each one at the same moment individually judged, convicted, and sentenced.

But if this dealing of God with each one is to mark the judgment day, it must equally mark the whole life which has preceded; for if the judgment be individual, the conduct which is judged must be individual likewise. In short, we learn that each soul that lives stands singly and individually before God, just as completely as if it stood alone in the universe, and the whole scheme of salvation were transacted between that one individual soul and its God. It is to this truth that I would especially call attention. Let each one place himself beneath the great eye of God, as if he and God met alone and there were no others than themselves. "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," and so that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

This truth of individual accountability needs, however, to be vindicated from the misapprehensions which are apt to cloud it.

I.—Let us regard the individual in relation to himself. "Every one of us shall give account of *himself*." The exact meaning of the words is more specific: it is concerning himself, just as if a steward were called to give account of the particular properties entrusted to his management. The idea of stewardship is very common in Scripture. In regard to other men there may exist full personal possession and an undivided right of property, but it does not exist in regard to God. As between us and Him there can be no proprietorship on our part, for

everything is His. We have nothing that is absolutely our own. God graciously permits us the use and benefit of His creatures; but He does not abandon His own rights, nor waive His claim. We are at best but stewards, with an account to render of the trust that has been reposed in us; and that trust, in the Church of God, as in every earthly business and well-ordered household, is precise and definite. There is a certain trust committed to each man, a something of which he has to take care, and for the safety and welfare of which he is responsible. This trust is *himself*. God has laid to every man's charge the care of himself; not to each man the care of some other man, but to every man the care of himself; the dying flesh, but above all the immortal, capacious, never-dying soul.

Let me not be mistaken. I do not mean for a moment that each man's care is to be a selfish one for himself alone, or that we are not called to feel and labour for other men's souls as well as for our own. The same Word, which warns us that each man must bear his own burden, charges us likewise to bear one another's burdens. But this still springs from our solemn charge of ourselves. For in seeking to save souls, it must be our own time, and effort, and money, not any other man's time, and effort, and money, that we must give to it. It must be our own opportunities and powers, not the opportunities and powers of other men, of which we must make use. It is still the right use of ourselves, though it

be for the good of others, for which we are responsible. The person for whose good we labour is one thing, and the person who labours another. I am bound to try to save other men's souls, because God has given to me grace, and time, and talent, and means to use; and I must give an account to Him of the right use of them.

Thus each man is put in charge with himself. What a priceless stewardship! — a soul made in the image of God, with an eternity either of weal or woe! In earthly things is not our anxiety to discharge a trust in proportion to its importance and the magnitude of the interests at stake? To have a man's estate, a man's happiness, a man's character and reputation dependent on our conduct — is enough to make the most careless grave, and the most reckless sober. But a greater trust is here,—a soul that will live for ever, precious in the sight of God as the blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish, of such infinite value that literally the accumulated wealth of the whole world is unworthy of notice when compared with it,—a soul for which the Son of God has died, and whose eternal redemption He has secured by the shedding of His blood,—a soul for whose conversion and sanctification the Holy Ghost descends from heaven, and for which have been provided means, and ordinances, and sacraments,—a soul with death and judgment, and heaven or hell, close before it.

Such is the tremendous charge put to each single

man's keeping. Let each one ask what he has done with it. Has he left the soul to starve uncared for, and unsaved? Has he allowed the devil to take it as his prey? Has he himself murdered it with sin, and stained his conscience with its blood? Or has he brought it to the cross, and placed it safely in the arms of the Redeemer, to whom it really belongs? To each man, I say, is given himself—not others to account for;—he must "give account of himself." Who must not be aware how dangerous a tendency there is to forget this? I am not worse than other men; not half so bad as many. Others are negligent; why may not I live a life of self-indulgence, and why should I be deprived of it? O blind and ignorant! What hast thou to do with others? or what matters it to thine own account how they live, or how they die? The question is about thine own self. For that thou art responsible; for that God will call thee into judgment, for "every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

II.—But, further, let us look at the individual in relation to other men and to our actions in common with other men. "Every one of us shall give account of himself." Man can never act alone, and least of all in this age of mutual combination and associated effort. We act together, and thus we gain an idea of common action in which we drown out of sight our individual responsibility. It seems to be supposed, that actions are divided among the number of those who do them, so that

if there are a dozen men, each one of them is only answerable for one twelfth part of the act and of the guilt of it. Men often appear to think that responsibility is diluted, instead of resting, as it does in all its completeness, upon each one of the whole, multiplied by the number of the guilty, not diminished by any division of the guilt. It is notorious, that men will do without compunction in a body what they would singly reject with indignation. Such a fact should justly evoke the warning of the Christian preacher, that each man is answerable for the act he does, if a thousand join in it, all the same as he would be if he did it alone. Unfortunately the evil does not stop here. It steps over the very threshold of the sanctuary, and invades the temple of God. However deeply devout a congregation may be, for instance, there will be cause to lament over some careless faces, some unbended knees, some silent tongues. Think you that, were each of them placed singly face to face with the awfulness of God, they would dare to act in His presence if they stood alone, as they act in His house amid the general crowd of worshippers?

Or, to take another case, can we doubt that the vastness of the number of unsaved souls in the world diminishes to each man's consciousness the awfulness of being an unsaved soul? In reality the number fearfully increases it, for heaven might weep over such a spectacle as a world of lost souls. But to the mind and consciousness of men it lessens it, and they feel very differently from what they would do,

if one soul alone, in all the solitude of its despair, stood trembling on the verge of the abyss.

If the text be true, no aggregate of numbers can affect the individual, either in the value of a soul saved or the sufferings of a soul lost. Each man's world is within his own breast. Singly and for himself he sins. Singly and for himself he must believe and be saved, or singly and for himself perish. Each will have his own recompense, his own eternity of heaven or hell. There is no dividing it, no sharing it, with others—no losing the single self in the crowd,—"For every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

III.—Let us look at the individual in relation to God, and to the duty that he owes Him. For here, another common error at once starts to view. It is the notion of some men that the individual obligation of work and toil and self-sacrifice for God is lessened, because others share the obligation with ourselves. It is our duty to do our share, we say, but why should we take more than our fair proportion of the burden? Thus we are led, instead of doing each one his best and manliest in the service of our Master, to measure out just what we think to be our own share of the common work. The principle may be very honestly adopted; but I am, nevertheless, sure that it is a mistaken one, and not the principle of the Word, for it draws the motive from man and not from God; whereas it should be from God, so wholly, that all

but He should be put out of sight. Every one of us must give account to God.

Suppose that such a spirit, as the mistake engenders, had animated St. Paul, instead of that burning zeal that led him to count not his life dear unto him so that he might finish the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus; how different would have been his labours, how different their result, how different his crown of glory! He himself records that he "laboured more abundantly than they all." Or try the principle by applying it to some earthly case. Take the case of a war. What is each man's duty, but to do his best and utmost? What think you would be the result, if every man just measured his own efforts by what he considered his proportion of the effort of the whole—what but weakness, failure, disaster, and disgrace?

All such calculations of proportionate duties are wrong. Each man must act for himself, as for himself he will be called to give account. He must do his best; not all he must, that is the slave's service; but all he can, for that is the service of the child and of the saint. Whether it be money, or labour, or talent, or time we are asked to contribute, let us do it, each one for himself and to the utmost of his opportunity. If each man did his duty, all men would do their duty. If each looked to himself and not to others, instead of weakness and failure there would be strength and victory, the song of triumph and the crown of glory for ever and ever.

Thus the truth of personal responsibility stretches out in every direction, and reaches alike to our relation towards ourselves, our relation towards God, and our relation towards our fellow-saints. There yet remains another aspect of the matter, which belongs equally to all these three relations. It suggests the motive, graciously supplied in the rich harmony of the Divine dealings, which shall stimulate the effort that it sweetens. For the doctrine of individual accountability has its complement in the doctrine of individual recompense. If the obligation be personal, so will be the reward which will crown the discharge of it. This is the climax to this side of the Christian life. Let it be traced upwards from its lowest manifestation to its highest completion, till it is actually lost in the very bosom of God.

The lowest manifestation is yet a noble and glorious hope, for it is our own personal enjoyment alike of the blessings of the Gospel here, and of its completed happiness hereafter. The joy of forgiven sin, the calm assurance of peace with God, the delight of communion with Him, the quiet confidence which rests on our heavenly Father's care, the rapturous sense of the beauty of Christ, and the bright anticipation of our everlasting rest with Him—are all our own. No man can deprive us of them. They are beyond the touch of human force, or the blighting shadow of human malice. The iron hand of human power may fetter our limbs, the body may pine in the dungeon, or bleed beneath the sword,

but our peace with God defies their reach. Our inward song of peace is sweeter for the storm without, springs up fresh and inexhaustible even as from the heart of God. And if this be true of the peace that passeth understanding, what of the glory to come? The perfect endless life, the undecaying youth, the rivers of pleasures at God's right hand, the spotless holiness, the radiant crown, and then the sight of God Himself, and the beatific vision of His glory, will all be our own—each man's very own for ever. Not his alone, it is true; for joys which come from God, are like God Himself in that they do not diminish by communication. They grow and multiply with sympathy, as each saint will stand amid his fellow-saints receiving and communicating bliss. Not his alone; but as completely, immeasurably his as if they were his alone, and there was not a soul beside to partake of them.

Yet this is but the first step, for we reach up from the joy to the Source and Giver of it. The saving love which has redeemed us by the precious blood of the Son of God is an individual love, and is set on each one of us. It is but human weakness that loses sight of units in the aggregate. Just as each one of the multitudinous creatures which make up the whole of the great universe has a structure and organs and a life of its own, so each one is the witness to a creative power which made it and keeps it in being. Just as each man has an individuality of his own, with hopes and fears, oys and

sorrows, with which no man intermeddleth, so he is the object of a love which is as individual as himself. No man can catch even a glimpse of the love of Christ till he thus appropriates it—enough for all, yet not more than enough for each. Each saint, as he looks at the wondrous work,—the incarnation, the nativity and circumcision, the baptism, fasting, and temptation, the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, the precious death and burial, the glorious resurrection and ascension,—may say, That was done for me. Is not this included in St. Paul's words: "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me?"

The thoughts must reach one step higher yet. We must pass even from the love which has redeemed us to the electing purpose in the bosom of God, whereby He chose us, as vessels made to honour, before the foundations of the world were laid. Was not this likewise personal and individual? The strictest reason can come to no other conclusion, than that each saint was present to the Divine mind for all eternity, and was loved by the Divine heart when the mighty plan of saving love was schemed. The thought is most wonderful. Yet it cannot be separated from our personal obligation and personal accountability. The mysterious dignity of the individual soul, so prominent throughout the whole of our life below, will but have its completion in the consummation of our life above, when "every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

VII.

THE LIVING EPISTLE.

"Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."—2 COR. iii. 3.

THERE is scarcely to be found in Scripture a descriptive epithet, applied to a Christian, which is more beautiful and touching than this. He is compared to a letter, written, not on tablets of paper or of stone, but on the fleshy tables of the heart; bearing a writing inscribed, not with human hand, but with the Spirit of God.

The illustration implies several things, which we must first adjust into their place and mutual relation, before we proceed to look at the contents of the letter itself. A letter implies, for instance, an absent person who sends it; for in the actual presence of friend with friend letters become unnecessary. All know the affectionate pleasure which a letter gives, in the assurance it conveys both of the welfare of the writer, and of his constant and unchanging love towards his friends. Now in the present case the writer is Christ: "epistle of Christ." Christ is absent, not indeed

in His Deity, which is present everywhere continually and for ever; nor in His Spirit, for the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, witnesses of Him to the hearts of His believing people; but in His Person, combining the God and the man in one. He is for a time absent, having gone into the heavens, and being seated at the right hand of God till He shall return in the fulness of time to take to Himself His power and to reign in manifested glory. In His absence He does not forget His loved ones, but communicates with them by letter. As for Himself, He tells them that He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. For His people, He assures them that He never forgets them, that He watches over them in their struggles, and only waits for the fulness of time to take them to the mansions He has prepared for them in heaven, that where He is there they may be also.

These letters are written on the hearts of His saints. The idea is pregnant with truth, and we need to take firm hold of it. It regards the Christian's inward life, not in relation to himself, but in relation to others. It has thus a wholesome tendency to take a man out of himself, and lead him to look to the will of his Master and His purposes, not alone towards us, but in us, and by us, towards others. Each Christian is an epistle written separately, each one bearing, no doubt, its own characteristics; but all alike in this, that they are communications from Christ made through the Spirit to other men.

For as a letter implies a person who writes and sends it, so it implies likewise a person or persons to whom it is sent. We are letters sent generally to all men, but specially to all those with whom God brings us into contact in the world, that they may learn from us the will of God towards them. There is no class of persons to whom the message is not addressed. It may be a message of warning to the unconverted, a message of caution to the careless, a message of guidance to the perplexed, a message of comfort to the saddened, of hope and confidence to the desponding. It is in one particular aspect, as a message of love sent to God's own people, that I specially purpose to regard it.

Each man is the letter, and each man is also the receiver of the letter. He is the letter of Christ to others, as others are the letter of Christ to him. How happily the idea binds up our own obligations with the honour and glory of our Master! How many thoughts of a tender and sweet responsibility it conjures up relative to our own characters, and the impression they are calculated to produce upon the minds of others. Shall we not take care that it is a full letter that Christ sends by us, written all over, and rich in instruction and encouragement? Shall we not see that it is a well-written and legible letter, not with the handwriting of the Spirit of God all defaced and blotted by our inconsistencies, but so plain and clear that, in the apostle's language, it may be "known and read of all men?" Let the life,

the character, the conduct, the conversation, the objects, pleasures, and pursuits all be so plain and consistent that none shall doubt *whose* we are, and to whose grace we bear witness. There are thoughts of deep heart-searching in this character, but also pleasant thoughts of honour and of love,—epistles of Christ, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God."

What, then, are the messages which should be read in the heart and life of a Christian?

I.—The example of Christian persons should convey the assurance of the freedom of the Saviour's love towards a sinner. With this message the living letter is written all over, and written in characters sharp and clear as is the soul's experience of its sin. The characters of converted men, and their histories before they were converted, may be infinitely various. We may be quite sure that in the conscience of every Christian that we meet there are secrets known only to himself and God—tales of Divine grace, illustrative instances of the marvellous dealings of the Spirit with souls, which never will be revealed till the judgment day. Perchance, these tales may be told in heaven as the theme of everlasting praise. Perhaps, this man was once an open sinner, finding his happiness and joy in rioting and drunkenness, in revelling and profligacy. This man, perhaps, bore a good moral character before his fellow-men, but indulged himself in secret sins, which none knew but the all-searching eye of that God to whom all things are open, and

who searches out even the thoughts and intents of the heart. This man, to use our Lord's illustration, was like a whited sepulchre, all fair without, but within full of all uncleanness. This other was perhaps a cold formalist, who deemed that he had satisfied all the demands of God upon him by attending church or chapel on the Lord's day, and perhaps by being a communicant. This man perhaps was a hypocrite, who palmed a deceit alike upon others and upon himself, and fancied himself to be a Christian, although no Divine power from heaven had ever awakened his conscience, or stirred his soul into a new life. This man perhaps was a sneering sceptic, who in his heart rejected all faith, and neither believed in God or Christ, in the soul, or heaven, or hell. This perhaps was an open blasphemer, his heart at bitter enmity with God, and no words strong enough to express his hatred of Christ. Infinitely different may the men have been before conversion, and infinitely different may have been the modes by which God met with them, and called them to Himself. One was saved by a sickness, one by a sore disappointment, one by a sermon, one by a text dropped from a child's lips, one by an entrancing sight of the glory and beauty of Christ, one by some solemn conviction of conscience, when God and the soul stood face to face, and reasoned together of sin and righteousness and judgment.

But however different they may have been, they are all alike in one thing—they are sinners, and

sinners saved. Sinners, once without the slightest power to help themselves, without the sense of sin, without a desire for Christ, without a consciousness of death and judgment—their souls as dead and stagnant as the mountain tarn that sleeps beneath the shadow of the hill, as silent and still as the grave where the dead lie and neither feel nor think nor move. They are now sinners saved, and all of grace, from the first moment of solemn conviction till the time that they found peace. The Word which, with its awakening voices, set before them the realities of death and judgment and eternity was the Word of God. The power which awoke the slumbering conscience was the power of the Spirit of God. The righteousness with which they have been accepted is the righteousness of Christ—the atoning sufferings and death of God's dear Son. All has been of grace; once far off, now near; once condemned, now saved; once enemies of God, now His children; once heirs of wrath, now heirs of heaven, and all of grace. Ask to whom they are indebted, and the chorus of praise will come back from ten thousand times ten thousand souls, "Not unto us, O Lord; not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake."

Would we see Christ's love to the sinner and His power to save—look at them. May it not be with many of them as with St. Paul, that for this cause they obtained mercy, that in them first Christ Jesus might show forth a pattern of all long-suffering?

Would we know that the love of Christ is free as the air we breathe, and broad as universal man? Would we know that there is no sin so deep as to be beyond the merits of the atonement, no sinner so lost and outcast as to be beyond the reach of His mercy, no spiritual ruin so absolute as to be beyond the power of His grace; learn it all here in these saved sinners, read the message of the Saviour in these loving epistles of Christ, "written with the Spirit of the living God."

II.—We read in the witness of the saints of God the sufficiency of Divine grace—the power of the Spirit of Christ to regenerate the heart, and to turn the proud and stubborn will to God. What the strength of sin is, and what the repugnance of the natural heart to God, with what dogged force an angry pride may close the conscience against conviction, what the power which habits of sin gain over the affection, what the desperate recklessness with which the will once set upon its objects pursues them at all risk, we know in our personal experience only too well. There are few, who have not in the past made resolutions of amendment and vows of a closer walk with God, and yet few who have not found them all undermined by the temptations of the world, worn away by the inclinations of the heart, swept down by the violence of sin as the feeble barrier may be swept away by the disastrous flood. There are few perhaps who have not striven and struggled, and yet so vainly as to give it up in despair and say that it is of no use

to try. We never know the strength with which a fallen nature wars against God, till we know it by experience, just as a man may gaze long on a swollen river as it rolls its full waters towards the cataract below, and yet may never know its fatal strength till he is himself upon the current, vainly struggling with all his might to stem the fatal force which is hurrying him onwards to his death.

I fancy that there are none, not excepting the most reckless of men, without some experience of the power of evil over them. Where, then, shall be your hope but in the Spirit of God? But how shalt thou know that the unseen Spirit is willing to help thee? or, if willing, competent to make thee a conqueror? Why, here is the epistle of Christ to assure thee of it. Look at this saved man; and unhappy indeed must be the lot of those who have not some true child of God amid the circle of their acquaintance; look, and watch him. You see indeed a poor imperfect human creature, with infirmities of temper and inconsistencies of conduct which catch your notice all the more from the Christian character with which they stand in contrast. Why is it that the world is so quick to see the faults of a Christian man, but because they are more perceptible in him than in any one else,—just as spots of rust become visible by contrast with the burnished surface which they darken. But, with all these infirmities, I appeal to you, whether there is not much in a true Christian to excite your admiration, and perhaps

your envy? At all events, one thing is clear, that the struggle you find so hard has been fought and won by him. The whole course of his nature is changed, and flows towards God,—a thing as wonderful as if the mighty stream were turned backward on its course and flowed upward. He now loves what once he hated, hates what once he loved. He is a changed and altered man,—born again of God. Ask him the history of his change, and you will find that it has been no work of his own. It is not of nature—that fatal mistake which thousands make, and persist in making, when they refer to nature what is all the work of grace, it is of God. But is not He who wrought it in thy neighbour, able to accomplish it in thee? He was once just like thyself. Perhaps thou hast not a weakness or a temptation which he has not shared; thou hast the same sins, the same struggles, the same experience. Yet behold him, bearing all over him the testimony to the power of Divine grace, and the sufficiency of the Spirit of the living God to renew the poor shattered ruin of a human soul into the image and similitude of God, to make its confused lines into an epistle of Christ.

Lastly, the character of a Christian man bears testimony to the certainty of the promises and the deep inward peace and joy which are the inheritance of the children of God. Who has ever heard a Christian man say, that he was disappointed in Christ, or did not find Him the precious and perfect Saviour he had believed Him to be? Ask whether

he has found the promises fulfilled, and there will come from his heart and lips the adoring confession of the apostle, "He is faithful that promised," and "all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him, Amen." Ask the man of the world if he has found happiness in excitement, in wealth, in honour and ambition, and he will frankly tell you, with a sigh, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The confession is like a moan out of the abyss compared to the song of praise, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints."

I admit, however, that this inward experience is not sufficient to satisfy the language of the text. For this inward peace cannot be seen. There must be some outward evidence of it before this living epistle, written with the finger of God, can be known and read of all men. Look, then, at the Christian himself, and see if he is not clothed with the beauty of holiness, even though the lines should be blurred and blotted by human frailty. Look at him with the inward peace in his heart, like a glory shining in his very face and making it like the face of an angel. Look at his moderation in enjoyment, his patience in suffering, his cheerfulness in submission. Look at him on the bed of death, when all the human dross seems to be purged away by the realities of that dread time, and his strong faith shines out, taking the sting from death and the victory from the grave, and converting the valley of the shadow of death

into the threshold of the better world. Even those, who sneer at the Christian while he lives, envy him when he dies. The calm face, the bright uplifted eye, the praise that trembles on the pallid lips, do they not tell of a faithful God and a peace that passeth understanding? Suffering, struggling, dying, yet strong in faith and firm in hope, look at him, and say, is he not an "epistle of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God?"

VIII.

THE GOOD DEGREE.

"For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."—1 TIM. iii. 13.

THESE words may appear at first sight to be narrowly limited to the discharge of a particular ministerial office; but fuller thought will recognise, embodied in them and underlying them, a much wider principle and a deeper truth.

The first reference of the words is to the office of the deacon in the Church of Christ,—supposed by some persons to be much the same office in the ancient Church, as it is in the Church of England. There is perhaps this difference, that the deacons were originally ordained by the apostles to look more immediately after the secular business of the Church; although the history of St. Stephen shows that they were not in any degree limited to this work, but were likewise zealous preachers of the Word of God. There may be also another difference, though of this we are not equally sure, that the diaconal office in the apostolic Church was more a definite office in itself, and less a preparation for the higher grade of the ministry, than it is in the Church of England.

The words prefixed to this discourse refer, in the first place, to a faithful discharge of the duties attached to the office of the deacon. They that have "used the office of a deacon well" are they who have laboured in the diaconate with honour to themselves and glory to their Master; for "well" is the same word used in the latter part of the verse, and translated good,—a *good* degree. It is the specific term for the beautiful in human action, in contrast to the grudging discharge of mere obligation. It implies in the labourer not only diligence and zeal, but also carefulness and purity of motive; and the best use of every power and opportunity that God has entrusted to us—the frank, loving, self-abandoning, self-forgetting discharge of a holy obligation. Such an idea cannot be confined to any special office, and it is not, therefore, the particular work done which is thrown into the front, but the grace shown in the mode of doing it—the beautiful discharge of duty for God, in whatever sphere of the Church it may be, and whatever the exact nature of the duty which is done.

But, further, the words furnish a stimulating motive to this earnest discharge of duty, by setting before the soul's desire a certain advantage that is to be secured by it. Here we must carefully put away the idea of buying,—that is, of meriting in any way, as if we bargained with God. The idea is naturally conveyed by the English word "purchase,"—"purchase to themselves,"—but it is not contained in the Greek word so translated. This is simply "acquire," "pro-

cure," "attain." And we must also bear in mind, that the words refer only to converted men, already members of the family of God. It is no question of a sinner seeking to save himself by his works, but of a saint already saved being stimulated to more devoted service by the hope of a Father's recompense. There are, naturally, differences in God's dealings with the world, and in His dealings with His own children already called out of the world. For the whole condition of a saint,—his conversion, his forgiveness, his reception into sonship, the grace by which he stands, his work for God, and his recompense, are all of grace, that is, of the free sovereign love of God in Christ, and of that alone. There is, therefore, no question of meriting here, but only of a Father's reward to diligent and faithful children. And what is the reward which is here set before the soul, as the object of its holy ambition?—"A good degree and great boldness in the faith."

It has been thought that the word "degree" refers to ecclesiastical position and church office; but such a meaning would be an appeal to professional selfishness, and would be utterly out of harmony both with the spirit of St. Paul, and with the meaning of his language. We must look much deeper to find the mind of God. Let it also be observed, that the word "good" has no idea of competition about it, or of earthly rivalry, such as we have when, with reference to a scholastic examination, we speak of a man taking a good degree. For the word, as I have said, is

the word for the morally beautiful, the spiritually good. A good degree is a degree full of honour, praise, and joy, and such as the soul may covet with all the force of a renewed and sanctified affection. The degree is just, however, what the English word expresses — it is a step or standing-place, as the threshold of a door. That step is a nearer walk with God, a more intimate, privileged, honoured state, a closer and more familiar sight of Him whom to know is life eternal.

Here, then, is the object of our ambition—higher than that of earthly business, or human politics, or social distinction; and that object of ambition is attached to the frank and loving discharge of duty. What a motive to stimulate the laggard courage, and quicken the cold heart, and nerve the strength for the struggles and the victories of the Christian life! What an animating end! what a grand object for desire, of which God will be the dispenser, the kingdom of Christ the sphere, and eternity the inheritance! "A good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The subject may well kindle our Christian ambition, and point our desires upwards to the very throne of God. In what consists the good degree, which results from the honourable discharge of duty?

I.—It consists in a higher state of spiritual life, a stronger faith, a brighter hope, a more entrancing and captivating love; in short, a larger possession of

God, as if the Deity within flung His own grace and glory over the soul in which He dwells. That such a state is both possible and blessed, a state to be desired above all other things, will be readily admitted. For that person must be unfortunate, who has not in the circle of his acquaintance some such saint whose whole soul is aflame with God, and who walks amid the familiar objects of daily life, consecrating with his own beauty every act and deed, and reflecting in a face like the face of an angel, the shining of the light that fills the soul within. Who among us has not breathed the cry, "Oh, that I could be like such and such a person?" Who has not thought, that the attainment of such a state of peace would be cheaply purchased at the loss of all other things? That it involves an intense spiritual joy we may easily see; for is there not joy in all life, in the life of nature, in the life of the body, in the life of the mind, and, above all, in the life of that which is higher than all else—the immortal spirit made in the image of God? What is such a state of grace but perfect health,—that is perfect life?

Grace is but the soul's health, the restoration of a sin-stricken creature into the full enjoyment for which it was intended. A large measure of grace is, therefore, a high measure of health,—and is not health delightful? Is there pleasure in the aching head, in the weary limb, in the scorching fever, or the racking pain, or the feebleness and languor and strange incapacities of sickness and disease? Who will not

admit the difference between them and the bounding sense of life which is but the result of perfect health, when there is joy in the very act of moving, delight in the elastic buoyant vigour of the frame, as, all in harmony and tune, and disturbed by no indisposition, it sees, and hears, and feels, and moves? But must not the same thing be true of the soul? Doubts, fears, alarms, conflicts, strange searchings of heart, dim gropings of spirit, and occasional agonies of conscience, and the gnawing aching pain of a self-upbraiding memory, are all the symptoms of spiritual sickness. Oh, happy he who rises above them, and through whose every faculty—the will, the conscience, the reason, the affections, the feelings—there courses the life of God, till every bounding pulse thrills with the joy and glory of the Deity.

That the honourable discharge of every duty promotes the health of the soul, is clear enough. For when a man tries to do what is right before God, there is a motive at work, and that motive is the love of God; and whence springs this love but from the sight of the cross and that redeeming work which the Son of God accomplished in His sufferings and death? In what sphere is duty done but in the sphere of the conscious presence of Deity, round about our path, and about our bed, and observing all our ways? In what strength is duty done but in the strength of the Almighty Spirit of God, descending from the heaven of heavens into the heart? How is that Spirit procured but by humble

prayer? With what encouragement does that Spirit quicken the heart, but with the hope of future glory? So that whenever a Christian honestly endeavours to discharge some duty, whatever it may be, beautifully, he does it by an exercise of faith, and hope, and love, and by a living intercourse with the living Father of all. The more constantly duty is done, the more constantly faith and hope and love are present; and then they grow by exercise till they become the soul's habit, its very life, the breath of its being, a part of the living self in the all-pervading presence and power of God.

That this high measure of spiritual life is the good degree of the text, is shown by the last words, "great boldness in the faith." The literal meaning of the word translated "boldness" is freedom, frankness, and confidence of speech. It has two relations. One looks toward man when the soul, rich in its own love for Christ, and actually overflowing with joy in the Holy Ghost, pours out to others the fulness of its own affection—not with an effort, but freshly, naturally, spontaneously, as the living spring within the soul itself, the power of the Holy Spirit of God, flows forth into utterance. Such a boldness of speech to others about their souls implies a glow and warmth of emotion, a strength of experience, and a power of love such as might fill the soul of an angel.

Then there is another meaning of the word. It is used elsewhere for boldness of access to God. It is the word, for instance, in Hebrews iv.—"Let us

therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace." The word is frequently used, and implies joyousness, very strong faith, and such perfect confidence in prayer, that prayer becomes an actual talking with God, the happy intercourse of a loving and confiding child with a loving and gracious Father. All this is spiritual, the high state of a soul that walks closely with God. The richest of all wealth, the most honourable of all honour, the highest of all ambitions, the happiest of all happiness, the divinest of all gifts, is here, for it is the gift of God Himself. What is the making of a fortune, what the attainment of an honour, what the satisfaction of a pleasure to this good degree and great boldness, when the Author and the End, the Giver and the Gift, alike is God, and heaven the home, and eternity the life with which we shall enjoy them?

II.—But a good degree includes a further idea, and that is a higher state in glory, a place nearer God in the world to come, a more perfect knowledge of Him, and a more entrancing enjoyment of Him for ever and ever. This, we must bear in mind, springs from the other, and is but its completion. It is not that God arbitrarily selects the saints to sit, if I may so speak, nearest to Himself. When the mother of James and John coveted honour for her children, and, thinking to anticipate their companions, came to their Master with the request that they might sit, the one on His right hand and the other on

the left, in His kingdom, He replied, "To sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is given to him for whom it is prepared of My Father." He does not deny, be it observed, that there will be differences of glory even in heaven, just as there are differences of degree in grace on earth. But He teaches that the one will follow the other; for grace is but the preparation for glory, the blossom of which glory is the ripened fruit.

God is infinite. His gifts will be boundless as Himself; His gifts of knowledge, of holiness, of strength, of joy and rapture, will be infinite. There is in God no limit whatever. Amazing thought! which at present overpowers the mind with its immensity, that all eternity will never exhaust God, and that literally there will be no end to the progression of the glorified saints in the enjoyment of God; height beyond height, knowledge beyond knowledge, joy beyond joy, for ever and for evermore. There is, I say, in God Himself absolutely no limit. The limit is in ourselves, and in our capacity to receive Him. You may fill a cup to the very brim till it runs over, but you cannot fill it beyond its capacity, nor pour into a small cup as much as into a large one. I doubt not for a moment that every soul in heaven will be full to the measure of its capacity; but I am sure that the capacity will differ. If for all eternity we shall enjoy more and more of God, it will be because the power to enjoy grows by enjoyment as the soul becomes larger and larger with the God

who fills it. Grace here increases the capacity for glory hereafter. The more grace, the more glory. The more of God we know below, the more of God we shall be able to enjoy above. The fuller, more abundant the service, the higher and more blessed the recompense.

Then shall we not seek for more? Must we not do so? Must not the thirst for God grow with the enjoyment of God, till the soul presses nearer to His side, and craves to drink more and more abundantly of the everlasting and inexhaustible fountains of the Deity?

"And when on joyful wing,
Cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon, and stars forgot,
Upward I fly;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer my God to Thee,
Nearer to Thee."

Such is the recompense of the saints. The hope of such a reward is a grand and elevating sentiment, far above those gross elements, which have led some to regard the hope of reward as an unworthy motive for a Christian. We need not attempt to be superior to our Master, who was influenced by such an incentive, and who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. The bestowment of any reward at all is wonderful, when the work is all of grace. But our gracious Master knows that we have need of the stimulus of it, and He has made it worthy of Himself. The attainment of it may well fire our am-

bition, for it is worthy of the aspiration of an archangel. Here fix thy soaring hopes, child of God, and hence draw the motive which shall lift thee up above the temptations of this life, and shall ever keep thee pressing onwards and upwards! Thy reward is no base thing that panders to thy lower and meaner self. It appeals to that nobler side of thee, in which thou art like God. To Him lift up thy soul, and the more thou art fired with love to Him for all that He has done for thee, and the more thou dost see of the perfections of Him who has saved thee, the more insatiable let thy soul be for God—the more constantly let thy desires soar up, and never rest till thou dost reach "a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."



IX.

SINGLENESS OF DESIRE.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."—PSA. cxxxix. 23, 24.

THERE is, perhaps, no psalm more familiarly known than that in which these words occur. It begins with striking the same note which sounds with singular strength and clearness in the concluding words: that is, it opens with the recognition of God's searching omniscience, not simply as a general attribute of the Deity, but as an attribute exercised in relation to the soul of the Psalmist himself. "O God," are the opening words, "Thou hast searched *me* and known *me*." This consciousness of immediate contact with God, and of the presence of His searching eye not only on, but in the very soul, pervades the whole psalm. From this opening thought he expands the theme of praise into a wonderful description of God's omnipresence. The assurance that He searches and knows our inmost thoughts arises naturally from the fact that He is present everywhere, for why should we suppose that He can be locked out of the depths of the human heart, any more than from any other part of His creation?

We need to see this, and we need to see also that God is not, if I may so express it, diluted by extension. We picture to ourselves God, as revealed in ancient times in the burning bush to Moses, or in the pillar of cloud and fire to Israel, or on the top of Sinai in thunderings and lightnings and voices, at the giving of the Law, or in the visible Shekinah that in the Holy of Holies rested on the mercy-seat; and in all these cases we recognise the majesty of the presence, and feel that no reverence, no sense of awe, though it sank into the depths of our being, would be too great for those who thus stood face to face with Deity. But it is, I think, indisputable that when we speak of God being everywhere, we do not recognise the awfulness of His presence in the same degree. The cause appears in part, at least, to be this,—we cannot understand ubiquity; but we think only of mere extension, just as we are familiar with the idea of extending substances, either as we extend gold by beating it out or other substances by dissolving them. In these cases the whole of the substance is not everywhere, but only a part of it. Unless we watch against it we apply the same idea to God, as if His omnipresence consisted of extension, so that in each individual spot He is less awfully, less completely, less absolutely present than He is in the whole. This is palpably a mistake. When we speak of God's omnipresence, that He is here as truly as you and I are here, that He is present everywhere, even though we take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of

the sea, we mean that the complete God is everywhere, not a part here and a part there, but the whole everywhere, in the indivisible unity of His nature—with every power, every attribute, every prerogative, the true awful majestic Deity.

This is the truth expounded in the early part of the psalm. Then the inspired writer proceeds to add that God was present with him as a loving God, whose acts of grace and kindness were so constant as to reach through all his life. He traces them in the body, fearfully and wonderfully made and fashioned by the hand of God, even before his birth. Then he proceeds to attribute loving-kindness to all God's thoughts toward him, each one a thing of grace and mercy, and in number, to use his strong metaphor, more than the sand upon the seashore. Have you ever lain down by the seaside and taken up a handful of sand, and, with this text on your mind, endeavoured to count the grains of sand, as I have often done? Then you will have felt the force and tenderness of the illustration: "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with Thee." He further adds that this goodness of God was not the indifferent good-nature, which treats all men in the same manner and makes no distinction between good and evil. For that God who was kind was also holy, and would not look on sin; just, and would certainly punish it. "Surely

Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against Thee wickedly, and Thine enemies take Thy name in vain." Then follows the text, the result of these combined truths—first, of God's omnipresence and omniscience; secondly, of God's kindness and love; thirdly, of God's holiness and justice on the wicked —" Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I have been thus careful to trace out, thought by thought, the connection of the different parts of the psalm, because it is only by doing this that we can find the mind of God, and catch the right tone and spirit of His words.

I.—The words express an appeal to the omniscience of God, in proof of the sincerity of the Psalmist's love to Him. There is a frank affection and candour about the words to which, I think, the heart of our own personal experience readily responds. They breathe the quiet repose of one speaking in confidence to another, whom he trusts, and whom he is authorised to trust. I know that some misapprehend the words, and, I think, most untruly, charge them with expressing self-righteousness and self-reliance, contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. It appears to me that this is a total mistake. There is a parallel passage in the reply of

Peter to his risen Master, which breathes the very spirit of the Psalmist. "Lovest thou Me?" were the words which, three times over, the Lord addressed with marked emphasis to His repentant apostle—"Lovest thou Me?" "Lord," was the answer, "Thou knowest all things." That is the very argument of this psalm, and here is its application: "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Think you that at such a moment, when the threefold question recalled, and was probably meant to recall, his own threefold denial of his Lord, that Peter forgot his own sin; or that his soul, wounded and bleeding from the three days' agony, was already puffed up with carnal pride? Such a thought is impossible; the very anguish of mind, involved in the appeal to His Master's omniscience, shows that nothing was further from Peter's thoughts than any presumptuous trust in himself. But he had searched his soul, and, conscious of his own sincerity, he appealed to the omniscient knowledge of his Master in proof of it.

Just so it was with the Psalmist; so it is, I believe, with all who are acquainted with their own souls. When we think of our sins and inconsistencies, our coldness and numberless defects, we doubt ourselves; nay, we even misapprehend ourselves. The conscience, bleeding with the sense of recent sin, will not be comforted. It lifts up its voice, and acts as its own accuser, and pronounces its own sentence; in its agony it looks up, and, conscious that God knows the heart better than the heart

knows itself, appeals to Him. His perfect knowledge cannot be ignorant, His calm, unerring wisdom cannot misapprehend or misunderstand our state or the sincerity of our affection. I am a poor, wretched sinner, so guilty, wayward, and foolish that no words can express my guiltiness, and yet I do love Christ. "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

There is no inconsistency in such a state. I mean that there is no contradiction between a pure and guileless love of Christ and the consciousness of sinfulness. I must be careful that I am not misunderstood. A true love of Christ cannot consist with the consent of the soul to sin, cannot be reconciled with a designed indulgence of sin, or with that half-intentional spiritual blindness which causes the soul to be unobservant of its own iniquities. On the other hand, the love of Jesus is perfectly consistent with an experience which hates sin, and yet hating it is all the more painfully conscious of sin. A great and vital change may have passed over the whole tone of the character and the thoughts, and yet the influence of sinful habits, and the weakness of heart produced by former submission to sin, may remain and lead us into transgression. It is just so in nature; the whole current of the river may be sweeping steadily towards the sea, and yet here and there, under the shelter of the bank, the waters may seem to flow backward. The higher clouds may be rushing towards the east, and yet the light scud

below may be driven by earth-born currents in a different direction. The influence of past sinfulness is painfully familiar to us, nay, was known even to the inspired St. Paul, and has been described in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans.

Nor is there aught of pride and arrogance in the appeal; for we do not seek forgiveness on the ground of our own merits. Happily, our justification, our acceptance with God, does not ebb and flow, rise or fall, with our sanctification. Our full, rich, unclouded hope of pardon rests in the righteousness of Christ alone, and that righteousness is infinite, and has no degrees in it—deep enough, wide enough, full enough to wash away all the sins of the whole world. Our sincere love for Christ, and all the obedience it produces, are not our own doing, but God's. Not to us, but to Him alone, belongs all the praise. We are His workmanship, not our own, and if there be aught of true love and faith in us, the praise is all His whose grace has produced them. Simple faith and childlike trust appeal from the misapprehensions of the world and the doubts and fears of our own hearts to the faultless omniscience of the Deity. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

II.—But, further, the words express a single-hearted and undivided desire, that nothing whatever

may interpose between the soul and God, or interrupt the enjoyment of His presence. This second feeling must not be regarded as a separate feeling from the first, but as a necessary part of it. The two together make up the sentiment expressed in this passage. Whatever there was in his heart, or in his thoughts, or in his manner and his conduct, displeasing to God, and which prevented his walking in the way of everlasting life, that the Psalmist was prepared to give up, holding nothing back. He would search, and see whether there was any way of wickedness in him. Nay, he would not even stop there. We do not half know ourselves, the human heart is so subtle, and deceitful above all things. Many and many a secret sin escapes us, because we are not honest and resolute in searching it out; others escape us because the sight of the soul is not clear enough, nor pure enough as yet from sin's blinding influences, to see them. Who can doubt that God sees sin in us where we are not conscious of it, and detects selfish and worldly motives where to our eyes all seems fair? The Psalmist, therefore, would not trust himself, nor rely on his own knowledge of his heart, but appeals to God's knowledge: "Thou who searchest me out, and knowest me, try and prove my heart, and see if there be any way of wickedness in me."

The entire sincerity of purpose, the simple love of truth, the total surrender of self into the hands of God which this prayer implies, will only be

appreciated, when we think how it is that God searches and tries the heart, and brings to our own knowledge our secret sins. Do we say it is by His Word? It is true; but yet we read that Word half our lives, and never know ourselves after all; the image reflected by the Divine mirror appears blurred as seen through the films of the sinful eye that looks at it, just as earth-born mists intercept the full sight of the sun. Do we say it is by His Spirit? It is true; for He alone can teach the soul to see Christ and love Him and follow Him, though it be beneath the shadow of the cross and amid the darkness of the grave. But the Spirit works by motives and instruments. What means does God ordinarily use to open our hearts to self-knowledge, and to cleanse them of their sins? Indisputably it is the instrument of affliction of some kind, bodily or mental, as He sees best. It is not that affliction of itself converts or sanctifies any man; but that the Spirit of God uses it in His own mysterious and wonderful way, working by it secretly according to His own deep counsels. God puts us into the furnace, that the dross may be purged out and the fine gold purified.

Surely, the Psalmist knew this. Surely, it was present to his mind, when he spoke these words. His prayer, therefore, implies a desire for holiness at any cost of discipline and chastisement; a wish to learn the lesson, even though it should be beneath the rod; to get nearer to God, even though the path

should tear him away from all he loved below. It is as if he said, "O God, give me Thyself. All other things I leave to Thy wisdom: give them, or take them away, as Thou seest best. Chastise me, if it be Thy will. Send me disappointment, sorrow, sickness, poverty; do as Thou wilt, but only give me Thyself." Thus considered, the prayer is a very wonderful one. Who of us, with the chastening rod in view, and God's method of teaching remembered, has grace enough, and singleness of heart enough, to offer the petition, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting?"

X.

THE INCREASE OF FAITH.

"And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour."—MATT. viii. 13.

THESE words present to us a general lesson embedded in the narrative of a particular circumstance. The story of the centurion and his sick servant is one of the most familiar New Testament stories. The fact, that the Gospel histories present to us no fewer than three Roman centurions of pious character, cannot fail to attract our attention to the contrast between their faith and the disbelief of the privileged children of Abraham. For if there was one position on earth which might have been thought beforehand to be more favourable to piety than another it was that of the Jew, in possession of the oracles of God and of all the privileges of the temple worship; and if there was one position more unfavourable than another, it was that of a Roman soldier in the corrupt and demoralised days of the Empire. The exhibition of singular piety and faith under conditions so unfavourable, reminds me of what I remember to have seen on the top of a bare English hill. At the very summit, where the ground

was swept by the strong sea-winds bare of any vegetation, but the close turf; where neither trees nor plants were otherwise to be seen; yet there, in that unlikely spot, lurking within the shelter of a small natural basin formed by the irregularities of the ground, I found a group of lovely flowers in full radiant bloom. No doubt wandering birds of the air had dropped the seed, and the God of nature had protected it. Here in these hearts we see the power of the God of grace; and in these instances we are shown how little in the world of spirit depends upon the outward circumstances, and how much upon the sovereign freedom and almighty power of the Holy Spirit of God.

In the present case, the faith of the centurion excited the admiration of our Lord. Jesus, we are told, "marvelled at it;" and indeed it was singularly great. Every effect we are accustomed to produce is wrought through material means. The workman works in the material of his trade, with tools which are themselves material; and even so, the skill of his hand and eye excites our admiration. But to work on matter by the mere force of will is an art of a different kind altogether, and incomparably more wonderful. In the case of the body and its ordinary diseases, the disturbed functions are restored or stimulated by the use of medicines, and, no doubt, there is also a certain influence exercised by the presence of the trusted physician on the imagination, and through it on the frame of his patient. But here

there were no medicines, nor even the bodily presence of the Healer. It was the simple exercise of an almighty will acting from a distance on a patient, whom the eye of the Wonder-worker did not see, nor His hand touch.

To us, in our days, the miracle is especially valuable, as answering all those speculations which refer our Lord's miracles to effects wrought on the nervous system of His patients, and therefore analogous to the cures sometimes recorded as having been wrought by so-called Spiritualists and Mesmerists. The miracle at a distance destroys all these speculations, and affords to us a wonderful instance of the omnipotence of Christ. The miracle was but an instance, on a small scale, of that power of will which was exercised by God in the creation, when He spake and it was done, when He commanded and it stood fast. Now, was it not a remarkable act of faith in a Roman officer to understand and recognise this absolute omnipotence of the Son of God; remarkable alike in its recognition of the Lord's Deity and in its conception of the almighty Will of God? The result attests the greatness of his faith,—"As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee," were the Lord's words. And then there follows, in that Divine simplicity of narration characteristic of the Scriptures, the statement of the attesting fact,—"And his servant was healed the selfsame hour."

I now leave the particular case of the centurion,

and direct attention to the principle which his experience illustrates. This is the necessity of faith as a condition of the working of the power of God. The age of miracles is indeed past, for the Son of God no longer treads our earth, and those on whom His own hands conferred the miraculous gift have been for eighteen centuries in the grave. Christianity needs outward miracles no longer. It is its own inward and abiding miracle. But our Lord is the throned monarch over our world, and He still exercises, secondarily and instrumentally, the same power which He exercised on earth in direct and visible miracles. We still need to receive temporal mercies at His hands as truly as ever. Health, deliverance out of earthly trouble, protection in danger, the safety of those we love, and the ordering of the thousand subtle threads of apparent chance and accident on which are strung our outward fortunes; we need them all, and it is of our Lord that we must ask them. The man who leaves the Lord's omnipotent will out of view in the calculations of his life, omits the one, and the one only, vital element of all. But, above all, we need His help for our souls in a thousand ways. We need preventing and assisting grace; wisdom to understand; comfort in sorrow; guidance in perplexity; victory over sin; support in life, and triumph in death,—and from whom shall we look for them, but from the crowned and throned Jesus? Then let us learn, that the exercise of His power for us is dependent on our faith. It is true of us,

as it was of the centurion, "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

I.—Faith is the condition of the exercise of God's power upon us—a condition, let it ever be borne in mind, of God's own making, and springing wholly out of God's own wisdom and love to us. I do not mean that God bestows no kindnesses on those who have not faith, or that He absolutely shuts up His compassion from the unbelieving. We know that it is not so. His love is free as Himself, and, issuing spontaneously out of Himself, is wide as the world. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

With what multiplied acts of forbearance, and what bounties of His providence, does He not appeal to men's hearts, and yet appeals in vain! With what strong motions of His Spirit does He follow them from the cradle to the grave, as if unwilling to let them go, and as if He could not bear to see them perish! But yet, where faith is absent, all these mercies are fruitless—they are like the falling of the rain upon the bare rock, where no verdure clothes its overhanging side, or like the sunshine upon the dewless sand of the desert that is scorched with its strength, but never fertilised. Such unaccepted, unrecognised blessings do not really give happiness to the outward life, for be it ever remembered, that happiness depends not on the state of our circumstances, but on the state of ourselves,

on the heart and the conscience. Men are miserable in the midst of the most profuse wealth and the most extravagant luxuries; and amid poverty and pain, sickness and death, are sometimes happy as an angel of heaven. Unaccepted mercies give no happiness to the body, and certainly none to the soul. They do but furnish new stings for conscience, new elements of remorse. God is good to all—good alike in the nature of His goodness and in Himself. But for our conscious enjoyment of that goodness faith is needed, and there can be none without it.

For, I ask, What is faith? and I reply that, speaking generally, faith is sympathy with God—it is the receptive attitude of the soul—it is the laying open of the whole being to the influence of God. If I would keep the tender flower from the frost, I must cover it up and wrap it round to shut out the icy touch that would freeze up its life. But would I quicken it with the sun I must take away all barriers and let its blessed rays stream in. Unbelief covers up and closes the soul: faith opens it to the sunshine. Can we conceive it possible that God can pour out His love on a soul that hates and rejects Him, and which is as incapable of receiving His love, as the bar of iron is incapable of receiving the dew which may rest on its surface but can never soften its structure? Can we conceive that God would force Himself into the heart against its will? Such a deed would be one of violence, not grace—of compulsion, not redemption—of tyranny, not love.

I ask, What is faith? and I reply, that it includes deep contrition for sin, absolute trust in the truth of God, delighted acceptance of the saving righteousness of Christ, and an intense longing of soul for more holiness, that is, for more of God. Now just try to conceive the position and attitude of a soul from which these are absent. God hath included all under sin; unbelief denies the fact, and asserts its own holiness. God declares us to be so sinful, that nothing but the blood of Christ can save us; unbelief rejects Christ. God declares that there is no happiness without Himself; unbelief scouts the declaration with contempt, and declares that it is sufficient for its own happiness. God claims to be all in all; unbelief rejects and denies Him. It is plainly impossible, even to our common sense, that God's special gifts should be bestowed on such a soul. First of all, I ask with reverence, Would such bestowment be just, and consistent with the holiness and majesty of God? Would it not confound all right and wrong, if the Judge of all the earth dealt in the same way, without any difference, with the righteous and with the wicked? Would it not be taking out of God's own hand all those instruments of chastisement whereby, most commonly of all His methods, He awakens slumbering consciences and draws souls to Himself? Would it not contradict the purposes of trial and probation, and frustrate the very object for which life has been given? Would it not be ignoring and condoning sin and fostering rebellion, and, by re-

noving the motives for repentance, fixing the eternal :ondemnation of all sinners?

Far from us be the thought that such results are)ossible. The bestowment of special gifts cannot)e: justice, mercy, love, holiness, all forbid it. The state of the soul towards God is not the sole condition on which the love of God is manifested. But it is the condition of our enjoyment of His love. Neither happiness nor holiness are conceivable without it. As we believe, so will it be done unto us.

II.—Faith is the measure of God's gifts to us. The gifts are proportioned to our fitness and our power to receive them. There are partial gifts for partial faith; fuller gifts for fuller faith. To recur to my former illustration, the measure in which the sun streams into a chamber depends on the degree in which all impediments are removed from its entrance. The limit is not in the glorious orb, but in that which receives it. It will enter wherever it can, though it be but through a broken chink. Throw wide open the broad shutters, and how it will stream in, till every object becomes beautiful in its rays! So where there is faith at all, though it be but the hand of a child that feebly takes hold of Jesus, there will be justification, pardon for sin, and acceptance with God. But conscious peace, the growth in holiness, the joy in the Holy Ghost, the full assurance that brings God down sensibly into everything, from the highest craving of the soul to the most petty detail

of daily life, all depend on the degree of faith. The parted lips of the babe may sip the honey of the promises, but the open mouth of the man alone can drink in all the precious draught. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Here comes in a truth of which we need, I think, to take firmer hold than we do. If there be degrees of faith, then faith must grow; and if it is to grow, it must be cultivated. It is most preciously true, that faith is the gift of God; the gracious bestower of it is the Holy Ghost, and He alone. And yet it is left to us to cultivate it nevertheless, just as the vigour of the body is the gift of God, and yet it grows by exercise. It is true the apostles prayed to their Master, "Lord, increase our faith;" but it is also true that He upbraided them with the feebleness of their faith—that is, He imputed it to them as a fault that they had not larger measures of it, when He said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" If we would have more faith, we must cultivate it; and I will tell you how.

In the first place, there must be conscious desire in your minds for more faith—not a general wish for more grace in a vague and unmeaning way, but a deep sense of your need of a fuller trust in God and an earnest desire for it. And from this consciousness of a spiritual want must follow special and specific prayer for it—prayer for grace to exercise it in the details of your life, and especially in those particular parts of it in which you feel yourselves most

tempted to impatience, discontent, or doubt. Pray for it, and dishonour not your Master by thinking that He will not be faithful to His promise, nor prove Himself to your happy experience "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."

Secondly, try to exercise faith. The gift, indeed, is all of God; but He works through the human effort. Not the listless idle soul, that folds its hands and takes its ease in Zion, will ever get close to God, but the soul that presses on and up, and, in our Lord's vivid language, "takes heaven by violence." Let prayer have its issue in holy endeavour to trust God, and recognise His leading in all things. Try to fling away that fretful irritability that fumes at every difficulty in your way, as the swift river foams round every rock and stone that checks its course. For did not God place the rocks there? and have they not all their use and beauty? The interruptions which distract your day's plan for your day's work,—are they not of God? And is aught forgotten by Him who numbers the hairs upon the heads of His saints? Learn to trust God.

Thirdly, to assist you in this effort, endeavour to watch and study the dealings of God with you, like one who expects to see God everywhere. Be not like the man who saunters along the road, not caring or thinking whom he shall meet; but like one who is looking out for a friend, and watches on every side to see him. Think of God as a real being, and

both in the answers to your prayers and in the details of your life, try to trace His providence: not, indeed, presumptuously peering into His secrets whose "ways are in the seas, and whose pathways are in the deep waters;" nor, on the other hand, carelessly overlooking either Him or His dealings. There are men, who pass through the material world around them, and who, never observing anything, take it all as a matter of course, and see no wonders in it. There are others who look deeper, and who see beauty and design, wondrous contrivance and wisdom, in every mound of earth and every blade of grass. Let us thus ever look out for God, and, seeing, we shall find Him constantly breaking through the veil of outward things upon the eye of faith, in all His majesty and love.

Lastly, let us dwell much upon the promises; let us live in them and on them, making them the habitual atmosphere of our religious life. For in those promises we shall not only find described and portrayed the faithfulness and power, the wisdom and grace, the truth and tenderness of our saving God, but we shall find our saving God Himself. For are they not His Word, and is He not in it? If we have never found God Himself actually there, it is because we have never looked for Him there. The closed eye cannot perceive His glory; open it and behold Him. It is true now, as of old; to us, as to the centurion, "According to your faith, so be it done unto you."

XI.

THE RULE OF THE SAINT'S LIFE.

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; proving what is acceptable unto the Lord."—EPHES. v. 8–10.

THE exhortation contained in these words is founded on the appeal immediately preceding. This is stated with extreme force and vividness of language: "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Not simply dark, but darkness. So ye are now not enlightened, but light. No more vivid speech can possibly be employed, for it is the form of language applied to God Himself, when He is said to be not loving, but love. But we must clearly fix the application of the words. Darkness implies ignorance, for in deep darkness, where no object is recognisable, movement becomes impossible; as, for instance, in the plague of darkness sent upon smitten Egypt of old, we are told that none moved out of their place for three days. It implies suffering and sadness, and is one of the most familiar images which we unconsciously use to represent our times of sorrow (I was going to say, unconsciously repeating the image), the dark times of

our life. But it implies also depravity and crime, for evil hides in the darkness, and has a natural sympathy with it. Darkness implies, therefore, ignorance, suffering and guilt; and light implies their opposites,—knowledge, happiness, holiness.

Who, then, are they who are said by the apostle to be dark? Are they the unlearned and untaught in human knowledge, in contrast with the wise and eloquent of the world? Evidently no. The word is palpably applied to all who are not Christians—those whom he describes in a preceding chapter of the same letter as dead in trespasses and sins. The most learned, the most accomplished, the most highly-gifted, the most eloquent—poets, artists, philosophers, statesmen—are all in the eyes of God dark, if they are not in Christ Jesus. And the strength of the assertion is intensified by the fact that Ephesus was a place of philosophers, a place where occult sciences were especially cultivated, and where men claimed the power of dealing with the spirits of the other world. "Ephesian writings" was the common name for works on magic,—in point of fact, for what we justly call the black arts, for they are, in the eyes of that God, whose foreseeing knowledge searcheth out all things, foolishness. All out of Christ are not only dark, but darkness.

But then there comes a change. Some were now light in the Lord. No one will doubt that they are the same persons who are addressed in the first verse as the "saints that are at Ephesus" and "the faith-

ful in Christ Jesus." All converted men, all true Christians, all real believers in Christ Jesus, are not only enlightened, but are light. That they are enlightened we shall all readily admit, for God hath shined in their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. But the special lesson which is impressed by the words, and to which I desire to call your attention, goes further. It is that they are light—that there is a positive power of light planted within them, capable both of guiding themselves and of being reflected upon others. It is not their own light primarily or meritoriously, but it is the light of God in Christ. "God is light," we are told; and our Lord said, "I am the light of the world."

I may illustrate my meaning by those reflectors which are used frequently among us to give light. They may be seen frequently in the great city near us, and you are no doubt familiar with them. Where the light is scanty, they are used to increase it. They give light. But yet they have no light in themselves. Every solitary ray of it comes from the sun, and they have not a spark of radiance of their own. The light is in the sun; but they are so constructed as to collect, concentrate, and direct its beams into a certain direction, and thus they give light. Just so, there is that in the soul of a converted man which gives light. It is not self-derived; for every ray of it comes from God. But the light is reflected by the soul, and communicated both within and without.

Surely nothing less than this can satisfy the meaning of the words, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: proving what is acceptable unto God."

I.—I ask your attention to the principle involved. It is that the law of a Christian life is to be found in that which is acceptable to God. In other words, our characters and conduct are not to be regulated by the bare outward letter of the law, but by something further. The result of the lesson is no doubt to raise greatly the standard of our Christian life; and who will deny that we need to raise it; who will not be conscious of the abyss of difference between ourselves and the apostles, between what we are, and that model of what we ought to be contained in the Word of God? The effect of the truth I am stating will be to make a Christian anxious to do a great many things which he has not previously seen any reason for doing, and to avoid many things which he has not yet seen any reason for avoiding. I am, therefore, most anxious to commend the lesson to reason and common sense, to show that it is not the dictate of enthusiasm or a fanatic mysticism, but the dictate of truth and soberness, when we look at things in the light of the other world, and judge by those great first principles of Christian truth and duty which are frankly acknowledged by us all.

The rule of our love is not to be found, then, in

keeping the bare letter of the command. It cannot mean that we are ever to fall below the command, but it means that we are to go much beyond it. The amusements we should enjoy, the service we should render, the dispositions we should cultivate, the acts we should avoid, must be ruled by a yet higher law than the letter of the Word of God. We all know that there are many questions lying on the borderland of the Christian life, on which there is a great difference of opinion among professing Christians. Some believe certain practices to be wrong, which others justify and practise. There will be few who have not had arguments at some time or another with some friend upon this subject of right or wrong. Nor will it be denied, that the constant appeal of those who would relax the strictness of the Christian life is to the letter. They ask for a text definitely forbidding such things. They demand proof that they are directly unlawful. They call for a positive, absolute regulation, and they will admit of nothing else.

It is my plea that this is plainly unreasonable; that beyond the letter of the law there is an unwritten law upon the soul, which interprets and applies the outward rule to a much wider circle of things than the letter of the word can possibly reach. I appeal to a common illustration, and I challenge any one to say that it oversteps by a hair's breadth the limits of plain right and reason: I take the familiar case of a servant, and I ask whether you are satisfied with a servant who keeps to the bare letter of your order,

and does nothing more? Do we not all value an active goodwill between us and others, and do we not expect that this goodwill should be shown in a desire to please us; and are there not a thousand nameless things which no mere letter of an agreement can possibly comprehend—little attentions, little modes of carrying out directions, little efforts to promote comfort, little acts of considerateness and sympathy which we expect to receive from each other, but which all lie outside and beyond the possible letter of a law? I think we are justly intolerant, justly indignant, at a service which follows exactly the letter of a bargain and nothing more, coldly measuring out so much work for so much pay, without adding a graceful act or a kindly thought to sweeten the relationship.

Is not this true? On what conceivable principle, then, shall it be different between ourselves and God? Shall we make our relation towards our blessed Master something colder, more formal and perfunctory, than exists between an earthly master and an earthly servant? If this be our religion, it is no wonder that there is no good in it, that it kindles no fire in the heart, throws no sweetness over the life—a dull, cheerless thing—without feeling, without grace, without joy, without peace; bare as the treeless desert, cold as the iceberg that floats down the polar seas, beautiful in colour, but without one solitary touch of life. I am sure that you will repudiate such an idea. Our love to God is to be as much higher than any earthly relationship whatever, as the heavens

are higher than the earth, as much deeper and stronger as the saving love of Christ exceeds all possible bonds that can knit man to man. But if so, is it not indisputable that our service to God must reach beyond the letter, and be guided by the warm instincts of a true and fervent love?

But is not this exactly the principle advocated in the text? We are to prove what is acceptable to God. It is to be the conscious purpose of our life to do it, and therefore in the first place to prove, that is, to ascertain and distinguish, what is acceptable to God and what is not. And by whose judgment are we to be directed but by those who are light, and the children of light? If you want to ascertain the nature of an object, do you go into the dark to see it? and if you cannot make it out, do you take an unlighted lamp to enable you to examine it more closely? You do not act so foolishly. You bring it to the light, and place it in some strong blaze that shall reveal it all to you. What is acceptable to God can evidently only be judged by those who have sympathy with God, to whose souls He has revealed Himself, and has placed His own gracious light within them.

It is not my purpose to discuss disputed questions of amusements; but I venture to repeat, that no one can judge of God but the soul which is in sympathy with God. I know that we are apt to put down objections to this pleasure or that, as due to the narrowness and fanaticism of a Pharisaic class. It is a dangerous argument, however true it may possibly

be to some degree, and should be used with the extremest caution. If those whom we admit to be eminent for piety and the love of God think this or that inconsistent with Christian purity and growth, the fact should arouse in every heart that wishes to please God an anxious doubt whether they are not right. That God appeals in this place to the consciousness of a converted soul is indisputable: "Walk not as slaves, kept by the terror of the rod within the narrow letter of a law, but as children of light proving what is acceptable to God."

II.—But from the principle we must pass on to the practical application. How are we to prove what is acceptable to God? Here we use the word in another sense, not simply as distinguishing, but as putting to the test, submitting to actual experience, and so proving what is acceptable to God or not. Is there any test arising out of our actual experience which may assure us whether or no we are following the mind of God? The language of the text evidently implies that there is. Is it inclination, or the facility with which we do it, or the effect of certain conduct in smoothing the difficulties of our Christian life? No, it is none of these, but rather the contrary. We may well doubt whether we are doing what is acceptable to God when what we do is peculiarly agreeable to ourselves, falls in with our inclination, and springs from plans of life which we have framed out of our own heart.

What, then, is the test? It is at least threefold. First, there is the test of the Word of God, that sure rule by which everything else must be measured. But I do not mean the letter of the Word only, its direct, positive precepts. It is unnecessary to speak to you of these; whatever they command is of course right, whatever they forbid of course wrong. But I mean the indirect test of the Word. Does any given pleasure, or pursuit, or habit bring us into closer harmony with the Spirit and the mind of God? Then it is acceptable to God. Does it put us out of tune with it, and make it more difficult to keep the plain command? Then it cannot be acceptable to God. For instance, there is the great command which not only stands foremost of all the Divine precepts, but which pervades the very grain and texture of Scripture. I mean the supreme love of God,—"with all the heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." Whatever helps us to love God more, must be acceptable; whatever chills and disturbs our love, unacceptable. Again, there is the great truth which meets us in every page, from Genesis to Revelation, the separation of the people of God from the world. Whatever tends to make our witness for our Master clear and distinct must be acceptable, whatever clouds and confuses it must be unacceptable, to God.

Again, the test may be found in the effect which any given course or habit has on our habits of devotion, and the soul's loving communion, through the Word and through praise and prayer, with its Father in

heaven. God, in the true instinct of love, would draw us to Him till heart beats close with heart. Whatever gives us less time and opportunity for intercourse with Him, and, above all, whatever interferes with our devotional frame and spirit; whatever indisposes us to the study of God's Word, makes us unfit for prayer, interferes with our relish for ordinances and sacraments, separates us from the conscious enjoyment of His presence. None of this can be acceptable to God, for it amounts to putting something else in His place, and loving this earthly idol more than we love Him. God cannot be pleased at our finding more delight in anything else than we find in Himself.

Lastly, beyond this, I believe there is in a soul in a state of spiritual health, where the reason follows God's teaching, where the affections find supreme delight in Him, and where the conscience is sensitive to inconsistency, an instinctive sense of what is right and wrong, a feeling on which aught dishonourable to God jars and is at variance, just as a harsh discord in the midst of a sweet harmony may offend the ear which is not skilled enough to detect its nature. Or, just as when we love, the tender heart may be consciously pained by this or by that which hurts us, although we could not give a reason why. We feel it to be unkind, and detect the selfishness of it and the absence of affection towards us, though there is, perhaps, nothing to give us grounds of open complaint. Have you never felt this? It is just

like that healthy vigour of the body, which repels disease by the fulness of its own life. So the soul, living in communion with God, feels by a spiritual instinct what is in harmony with God, and what at discord with Him. Whatever a Christian needs to justify to himself by argument, may well be doubted. As the spontaneous instincts of love are sure to be loving, so the spontaneous instincts of a holy soul are sure to be holy, for they are guided by the Spirit of all holiness. Do what your conscience moves you to do. Avoid all things that are doubtful. Let nothing that jars with love be left upon your heart. Are you not changed men and women? "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light, . . . proving what is acceptable unto the Lord."

XII.

ZEAL.

"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." —TITUS ii. 14.

THE key to these words is to be found in the fact that they describe, not the quality of an individual person, but the characteristic of a class. The writer is speaking of all those for whom our God and Saviour Jesus Christ gave Himself, and he describes them after the ideal in the Lord's mind, that is, such as He would have them to be. Our Lord's sufferings and death had a practical object in them. This was to gather a people unto Himself, out of the unbelieving world which lieth in sin. This people are not a narrow circle within the broad company of the saved, as if there were two classes, the saved and the elect: they are but one class; the saved and the elect being in all cases the same. The man in whom the purpose of the Lord's suffering and death is accomplished is necessarily a saved man. If he be not a saved man, then the sufferings and death of Christ have not accomplished their intended work upon him. The people whom the Lord

hath redeemed to Himself are therefore all the saved, neither more nor less. There are none saved who are not included in this people. Nor are any included in this people who are not saved.

This seems clear beyond dispute. But it follows that, if the Lord's people consists of all true Christians, then the character belonging to the Lord's people must belong to all true Christians without exception. There cannot be a believing man or woman in whom it does not appear, and who must not cultivate, by the aid of the Spirit of God, the graces appropriate to it. This common character of all God's people is described under three heads. In the first place, they are justified from the guilt of sin through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. They are "redeemed from all iniquity." Secondly, they are sanctified by the Spirit of God—"justified unto Himself;" and, thirdly, the inward life of their soul has its visible influence in their character and conduct. In character they are a "peculiar" people; in conduct they are "zealous of good works." To be zealous of good works is therefore as essential a mark of the people of God as is justification from the guilt of sin and sanctification from its power.

Now the importance of it lies here, that if zeal in good works be the common mark of all true Christians, it cannot consist in any merely personal quality of an individual. How widely men do differ from each other in natural constitution, both of body, and mind, and heart, we all know full well.

Thus there are some persons endowed with a natural ardency and warmth of disposition which expends itself on every object. There is a constitutional energy of character, which leads them to take up with great intensity of purpose and concentration of effort whatever engages their attention. Such men can do nothing by halves. In the higher forms of this constitution, where it is not a mere effervescence of feeling, but a real force and strength of will, there is much to be admired, with a corresponding temptation, however, and with a proportionate responsibility. With this natural energy we are all acquainted. But this, whatever we may think of it, is not the zeal which the Word of God demands and the Spirit of God inspires; for this is a gift of natural constitution, and it would be enough for a man to excuse himself for the want of it, by saying that it is no part of his natural endowments. Far be it from us to impute the faintest shadow of an injustice to God, or to suppose that He will hold men answerable for the want of a gift which He Himself has withheld from them. Natural fervency and ardour is not Christian zeal, and men do a gross injustice both to God and to themselves when, seeing a Christian intensely in earnest in some Christian work, they impute it to nature and not to grace.

I do not deny, either the fact that men are differently endowed, or the fact that this difference affects the work of grace upon a Christian.

I pause for a few minutes to endeavour to make this clear, because a right conception of it affects not only this particular grace of zeal for good work, but every other Christian grace beside, for there are none in which men do not naturally differ. Not only are some men naturally more energetic than others, but there are also some naturally more cheerful, more contented, more good-tempered and amiable, more gentle or more generous than others. Yet who would think of denying that cheerfulness, contentment, amiability, gentleness, and generosity are general Christian graces which every believing man must endeavour to cultivate, and must more or less possess? All men will not possess them equally, and it maybe that natural constitution may make all the difference, as to what graces will be most prominent in the character after conversion. That it is more easy for a man of natural energy to exercise zeal, for one of a buoyant temperament to exhibit cheerfulness, for one of constitutional amiability to be kind and gentle, I most readily admit. Still, it does not follow that, starting from his own natural stand-point, every Christian may not grow and must not grow, in every Christian grace. They may all grow alike, and yet not be all equal in the end, because they were not equal at the beginning; just as a group of boys may all grow exactly the same amount, and yet not be equally tall as men, because they were not equally tall as boys.

Could I by some mechanical agency suddenly lift

any group of Christians upwards, I should not equalise their stature, although I raised every one to the same extent. So it is with the soul. Every Christian must grow in every Christian grace, although that grace may not reach an equal perfection in them all. Natural constitution is no excuse before God, for there is no respect of persons with Him. If a man says, I cannot exercise kindness and amiability, because I am naturally rough and passionate; I cannot be generous, because my natural tending is to parsimony and covetousness; I cannot practise Christian zeal, because I am cold and phlegmatic, that man only deceives himself. What part of their position shall a beleaguered army endeavour to strengthen, but that which which is weakest? In what direction shall the sentinel watch, but where the danger lies? What part of his house shall a householder repair most carefully, but that where wind and weather find an entrance? Over what part of his character shall a Christian watch most anxiously, what grace shall he most carefully endeavour to cultivate, but that which is naturally weakest, and against which it may therefore be expected that Satan will direct his keenest assaults?

I have said, that if Christians do not advance so far in a grace naturally alien to their constitution, as others to whose constitution it is naturally consonant, it is no reason why they should not cultivate this grace. I have said that this proportion of

natural constitution to Spirit-taught grace may exist; but I must now add that I do not believe it to exist. The growth of a child of God in any Christian quality does not depend on nature, but on the degree in which by watchfulness and prayer and loving trust in God he tries to learn and exercise it. Through grace a passionate man may become the most gentle, a niggard the most generous, a cold calculator the most zealous and ardent. The quality in which a man is most deficient by nature may be the very quality for which he is most eminent by grace, because the very knowledge of his weakness may lead to closer vigilance and more earnest prayer. The strength is with God alone, and He who made the stripling David a victor over Goliath the giant, can also make the weakest sheep of His flock more than a conqueror through Him who loved us.

Having thus cleared the ground of misapprehensions, I come back to my special subject. It is not a quality of nature, but an acquirement of grace, of which the apostle speaks; for he describes, not what is peculiar to this or that man, but what is common to all converted men. What, then, is zeal for good works? Zeal is intense earnestness in the accomplishment of an object, passionate ardour in the pursuit of it. It is not, therefore, be it observed, mere excitement of feeling, mere demonstrative warmth of expression, mere quickness of emotion, but something far more deep and enduring.

It is a working practical energy. It is a power which may be directed to things indifferent, to things good, or to things bad. Accordingly the word is sometimes used in the New Testament in a good sense, and sometimes in a bad one. It is used in a good sense in the apostle's words, "Your zeal hath provoked very many;" in a bad sense, as when the apostle enumerates "emulations" among the works of the flesh, expressed in the Greek by the same word.

What zeal is we know by experience. Thus, for instance, zeal is shown by men of science, when they explore the remotest territories of the earth from torrid zone to the everlasting snows of the far north, or leave their bones in Australian wildernesses in order to settle a question in geography; or when they sacrifice their own lives in the study of disease and the resolute battle with death. So also in things bad. Zeal is shown by infidels in the propagation of their opinions on all occasions, in the sacrifices made by violent revolutionists in the execution of their plans, in the efforts of those who would take our Christian Sabbath from us; all of whom spare neither pains, nor labour, nor expense, but are lavish of all to agitate for changes which will undermine the solid foundations of our liberties and our religion. What restless, unwearying zeal there is in Rome,—slowly, silently but surely, extending her efforts and diffusing her poison over the length and breadth of our land. In the face of such illustrations we blush for the

Church of Christ. I do not forget the great army of zealous men and women who are doing their Lord's work; doing it at the cost of money, labour, and life. Thank God for them! But, many as they are in themselves, they are but few compared with the vast numbers of our congregations. Glance at the many thousands gathered together for worship every Lord's day; and where, in the mass of them, is the burning zeal, the deep, earnest, prompt, absorbing, forgetfulness of self, and devotedness to Christ, which is dear to the heart of our Master, and was among the prompting motives of His immeasurable love? He "gave Himself for us, . . . that He might purify unto Himself a people zealous of good works."

Such zeal can originate only from some strong emotion, just as the rush of the limpid spring at the mountain side shows the abundance of the water that feeds it. Zeal is force, moral force; for it is the great moving power of the world. Force can only arise from an adequate motive, just as the great river is not fed by the scanty summer showers, but gathers its strength from the rains that fall upon a thousand hills.

Now the motives presented in this very passage are common to all Christians, as the grace they produce must also be common to all Christians. The ultimate spring is love,—purest, holiest, sweetest, most abiding of all motives, the very essence of true religion, the alpha and omega of its power; the one

thing which of all other earthly things approaches most nearly towards omnipotence, for it is itself the reflection and choicest prerogative of God. It is love for Christ awakened by His love for us—the deep echo of a converted human soul to the suffering cries and agonised accents of the dying Saviour, who "gave Himself for us." It is love quickened by the grateful experience of the peace which fills the heart when, laying its guilt on the Sin-bearer, it is conscious of being "redeemed from all iniquity." It is love deepened by profound obligation as it remembers that the very object of that love was to purify us unto Himself, and by wondering adoration of that free grace which has called us to be His peculiar people, with a world of wealth in our hearts of which an unconverted man has no knowledge. Are not these motives powerful enough to kindle zeal? ay, and to maintain it and keep it alive—a power so strong, a divinely-given energy so deep and true, that it is a happiness to live for Him, and would be an honour to die for Him.

There is, further, one thing by which such habitual zeal must necessarily be characterised. If it is the common grace of all Christians, if it springs from motives which are abiding as the life of a redeemed soul, and is produced by the power of the almighty Spirit of God, then it must be a steady, permanent force, not transient, not occasional, not flickering up into a vehement flame now and then and dying away again, but like

the sun in the midst of the heavens, or like the constant laws of nature that hold sun, moon, and stars ever circling round their central God. If it be permanent—a force constant as the attraction of the material world—then it is ready for all occasions, never slumbers nor wearies, and makes no distinction between now and then, this and that, between small or great, between what we like and what we do not like. It measures everything, not by itself, but by the majesty of Him for whom it is done, and who sanctions with His own eternal recompense even a cup of water given for His sake. Zeal is such an ever-ready, all-mastering force, for is it not the work of His Spirit who made the small things of the world as well as the great, and who is, I think, to our minds far more wonderful in the multitudinous orderings of the very little, than in the rolling of worlds and the span of the over-arching heaven?

Now, the practical application of all this to the conduct of the Christian is close and immediate. He must be ready to welcome every opportunity of doing his Master's will, and, whatever be its occasion, must do it with all the energy of his renewed will and the force of his regenerated being. The lesson was known to the Wise King: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;" but how weak is the motive he draws from the shortness of life, compared with that urged in the vivid appeal of the apostle: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that

of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." When the mind ventures to conceive such a state of things, as that every converted man should be filled with an intense earnestness both for the progress of his own soul and the advancement of the work of Christ in the world, it is amazed at the enormous spiritual force which such a condition would evidently engender. To such aggregate power in the Church no difficulty would be insurmountable, no victory impossible. A single glance at the state of the Church and at the immense efforts by which alone her present scale of labour is maintained, serves to show how far, how very far, the holiest Church, the holiest congregation, upon earth, is from reaching such an ideal. Yet is it not God's ideal? Is it not within the practical possibilities of grace, if there be but desires large enough to seek, and faith strong enough to trust? Let each one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ do His work, and see that the defect is not in him. Let him pray and strive to fulfil all the purposes of his Master, and, recognising His will in every power and faculty and opportunity he possesses, prove himself the true disciple of that Divine Lord who gave Himself for us, that He might purify unto Himself "a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

XIII.

FORTITUDE.

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."
—2 TIM. ii. 3.

WEAKNESS and effeminacy have ever accompanied the later stages of all human civilisation. The means of luxury are multiplied, the course of life becomes more smooth and easy; what were at one time the privileges of the few become the common comforts of the many; manners grow more soft and gentle; the food, the dress, the house, more refined and artificial. The result is, that temptations to self-indulgence increase. Men are less accustomed to exercise self-control; the power of endurance is weakened, because there is no longer need to practise it; the control of the moral principles is undermined, and all the sterner, manlier virtues, which enable men to do and bear, fall into decay. This has hitherto been the case so universally with all the nations of the world, as to develop a definite cycle of national life. A people, it may be rude, and coarse, and cruel, but full of courage, dauntless of danger, and inured to bear privation and fatigue, and, from their very lack of

luxuries, accustomed to hold human life cheap, become a conquering nation, and settle themselves in the fertile plains and cities of the vanquished. Then the process of effeminacy and deterioration sets in among them, and that nation becomes effeminate, and passes away as the nation preceding it had done. Either society actually rottens and falls to pieces by the dissolving influence of its own vices, or, weakened by indulgence, it falls a ready prey in its turn to the sword of some ruder but manlier enemy. In the ancient nations of the world such has been the invariable process. The question has often been asked, Does the law still hold good, and must the nations of modern Europe decay and die, as the great nations of antiquity have done?

If we had nothing but human nature to look to the reply would be an unhesitating, Yes. But we have another element in our case, what our Lord calls the leaven, to spread its own healthy influence through the otherwise fermenting mass of humanity; and upon its regenerating force all our hopes of a happier future must rest. We have Christianity to help us—I mean Christianity not alone as a system of great truths which supply the strongest imaginable motives for self-control and endurance, and which, therefore, tend to preserve all the higher qualities of manhood; but also as a Divine force—the force of the Spirit of God Himself acting on the human heart and enduing it with a new principle of life. If Christianity keeps us from effeminacy, it will keep us from

ruin. I cannot for a moment doubt its power, because it is the power of God. But it therefore follows that, if it is to save us, it must be a real Christianity—a Christianity such as God originated and such as God will work by. It must not be a bastard Christianity, like that of the Church of Rome, where every grand and blessed truth of the Gospel is travestied and parodied, and where the whole result of the teaching is to substitute the human for the Divine, the outward sacrament for the inward power of the living Spirit of God, and the priest for Christ. Neither, on the other hand, must it be a Christianity deprived of its proper power over the heart and conscience—a formal, idle, unenergetic thing, from which the reality and force have evaporated.

Now it is, I think, the most serious thing in the present condition of the world that, not only has a luxurious civilisation weakened the domestic virtues, especially among some women, whose extravagances have become almost a satire upon womanhood,—I say among women, because the love of athletic sports to a considerable degree checks the tendency among men; but that our Christianity itself has caught the infection and is demoralised by self-indulgence. The effeminacy has reached even our religion. Words and sentiments take the place of deeds. The charm of the eye and the ear are substituted for great inward principles; the grandest truths are welcomed, admitted, admired, but not

acted upon in daily life. The Church is enormously below her own standard. A refined self-indulgence spreads everywhere, and if it continues to spread till it touches the very heart of the Church and nation, then indeed there can be no hope for us. I cannot doubt that it is the providential object of the struggles of faith belonging to our day to revive the manliness, the independence, the reality, and power of our religion, just as nations amid sufferings and disaster recover the manly virtues which have rusted in prosperity and ease. Shall we not each one of us try in our place to learn the lesson, to be more real, more sincere, more earnest, more true—in short, to lay to heart the brief pungent lesson of the apostle, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ?"

There are many obvious reasons for cultivating a more robust and manly earnestness in our religion.

I.—It is due to the character of the great Master whom we serve. This motive is the one here suggested by the apostle,—"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath called him to be a soldier." "No man that warreth" should be, literally, "no soldier who is on service." The words, let it be remembered, are not applied to ministers alone, though, being addressed to Timothy, that may be their primary reference. But the reference is universal,—"No man that warreth." It cannot be doubted that, in the vivid

language of the Word of God, every Christian, without exception—man, or woman, or child—is called to be a soldier, any more than it can be doubted that conflict, with all its ideas of danger and watchfulness and struggle, enters into the actual personal experience of us all. Then, to return to the text, the word "entangleth" implies not the total severance from the affairs of life, but only the keeping of them in such absolute subordination, that they are not allowed to interfere in the slightest degree with the duties of the soldier. The earthly soldier must leave wife and children and home, at the call of the trumpet, for the weary march, the midnight bivouac beneath the skies of heaven, the duty of the sentry, and the clash of deadly battle. No doubt in his silent watch, or on the eve of conflict, his thoughts revert to home, and he wipes away the unbidden tear as he thinks of those he may never see again; but none the less for this, perhaps all the more, he nerves his brave heart for the stern work of the day, and is among the foremost, where the strife is thickest and death most frequent. The Christian soldier, with his grander motives, must not be less stedfast.

By "him who hath called him to be a soldier" is meant the commander of the army. It is the gift of all great soldiers to infuse their own indomitable spirit into those they command, and to mould them after themselves. The records of war are full of many and many a tale, where the personal heroism of the general has led his men to victory, because he

has raised their spirits to a pitch which made defeat impossible. Every peril has been cheerfully faced, because their leader has shared it with them; and none have flinched, because they have seen his calm face, and heard his cheery voice, and watched his dauntless attitude. A throng of cowards, bravely and nobly led, and yet turning their craven backs to the foe and leaving their chief to die alone, is one of the most ignominious of spectacles. The mere recall of these thoughts points the lesson for ourselves. We look up to the Captain of our salvation, and every imaginable motive which can nerve the human heart combines to inspire us with dauntless courage and unflinching fortitude. There is love to Him—all constraining love to Him, who gave His own precious self for us, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. There is duty, because we are His, bought by His blood, and bound to Him by ties to which the claims of the highest earthly patriotism are few and weak. There is interest, for we are only safe where He is, and if we once quit His side there is no hope for us. Above all, perhaps, in this immediate relation, there is His personal example and the imitation of His life. Think what an humble, lowly, suffering, outcast, self-forgetting life it was, as He trod the saddest and darkest paths of human experience, and consecrated them with His footprints. Place that human life in comparison with the glory of the Deity which He had before the world was, and quitted to become

flesh; nay, rather with the "fulness of the Godhead" which dwelt in Him during His humiliation and death. Think not only of His physical and bodily sufferings, but of His mental anguish, caused by the scorn and contempt of the unbelieving, the timidity and faithlessness of His own disciples, the cowardly desertion that left Him alone, the murderous injustice of His judges, and the unutterable horror of their cruel insults. Think, lastly, of the spiritual anguish, of the agony in the garden and the passion on the cross; think of all this, and ask whether we should not walk worthy of Him. Why, the cross is the very symbol of His people. Will He accept, think you, the self-indulgent coward amid the ranks of His heroes? Let His own words in Matthew x. 37 give the answer,—"He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me." Surely, as we watch Him, worship Him, study His life and His Word, and hold communion with Him, even our poor hearts will be kindled by His Spirit, and we shall "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

II.—A robust earnestness is due to the necessities of the work. God takes every possible precaution in His Word that we should count the cost, before we enlist under our Captain's banner. I do not mean that our faith in Christ is to be a matter of cool calculation

and selfish balancing of gain and loss. When the soul of a man is once stirred by the Spirit of God, and shaken by the deep sense of personal sin, by an alarming glimpse of the holiness of God, and a warning sight of the dread realities of the world to come, cold calculations are impossible. As well bid the flowing river be still, or the rushing wind to stop, or the burning sun to arrest his heat, as expect an awakened and alarmed conscience to sit down and calculate. The inward fire that burns in the soul cannot be suppressed. The Christian life is not the calm reverie of the philosopher, but the stern conflict of war with all its eagerness and enthusiasm. If there were no punishment to be shunned, no reward to be gained, a converted man would still follow Christ by the inward necessity of his own convictions. But, nevertheless, God would have us count the cost, and never forget the urgency of the fight or the strength of our enemies, lest, perchance, we get careless, and, in the weakness of presumptuous pride, lay ourselves open to the attack of the evil one, to be smitten hip and thigh, even to the death.

We have, indeed, Divine strength to help us. The electing love of the Eternal Father, the perfect atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness of the Eternal Son, the all-sufficient wisdom and strength of the Eternal Spirit, are pledged to our final victory; but they are given to help, not to supersede. Our battle requires all our strength, and nothing less will suffice. The very saints hardly press into the kingdom: they

take it by violence, and enter like soldiers after a hard-fought fight—wounded, bleeding, and weary, but conquering. Our own nature is so weak and so deceitful, our enemies are so strong, our temptations so manifold and so interwoven with all the cares and riches and pleasures of life, nay, even with its very duties, that we cannot afford to give one advantage to our spiritual enemies, or to throw away one from ourselves. We must get rid of our habitual sins, and the weight which so easily besets us; we must keep our hearts loose from the world; we must devote the best and freshest of our time and thought to God; we must follow Christ with a perfect heart; or all effort will be in vain. We must conquer or be conquered—for there is no other alternative,—live or die.

And this endurance of hardness is the more necessary because, not only are habits of personal self-denial and self-restraint, watchful devotion and earnest effort, the conditions of victory, but they are actual parts of the victory themselves. For what is sin in its essence but the alienation of the heart from God? and what is salvation but the restoration of the heart to God? and it cannot be given to God till it is delivered from the ruling love of ourselves and of every worldly thing, however lawful and right in itself. The cross is the present motto of the Christian, the crown his future hope. But to be a Christian, and not follow Christ; to be converted, yet to love the world; to be a follower of the Cruci-

fied, and yet to live without habitual self-denial, is a contradiction in word and an impossibility in fact. Are we earnest in wishing to be His? Then we must "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

III.—Manly vigour is due to the abundance of the reward. This motive is addressed to the Christian, not to the man of the world; to the converted, not the unconverted. Salvation itself is not of reward; it is all of grace. Heaven is not a recompense for human righteousness, as a man may be recompensed for some human service. No man can say, I am a good and righteous man, and therefore I am safe. No man is safe, till he is in Christ. It is free sovereign grace, out of the spontaneous love of God, that calls the soul. It is a free atonement, a sacrifice freely made by Christ out of His love to us, by which the soul is redeemed. It is the free, undeserved power of the Holy Ghost by which it is sanctified. It is all of grace, not of works. But once let the soul find Christ, let it be accepted within the family circle, let it fairly take service beneath the banner of Christ as the faithful soldier and servant of a crucified Master, and then God deals with it by rewards.

Need I tell every student of the Bible how great the reward is? In what magnificent terms does the Word set it forth to us—such terms that all human amplification only seems to weaken them. Think of the sonship with God, and all the privileges it involves of present communion and future inheritance.

Think of all things being yours,—"The world, life and death, things present and things to come,"—all yours. Think of the expressions of this chapter, "living with Christ," "eternal glory" with Christ; or His own yet more wondrous words of sitting with Him on His throne, as He is set upon His Father's throne. Think of the "weight of glory" that shall hereafter be revealed,—the risen body, sinless, sorrowless, painless, deathless, glorious, the soul washed from the last stain of sin, and seeing God face to face. Think of being a "joint-heir" with the Son of God, "an heir of God," sharing "the fruition of the glorious Godhead!"

Think of all this, and say, Why is this plenitude of recompense prepared? Why this fulness of reward revealed, and with such a blessed emphasis pressed upon our hearts in the pages of the written Word? Is it not to encourage and stimulate us onward? Surely, no faltering service, no hesitating obedience, no cold, unmeaning profession, no falling back in the day of battle, no craven fear of danger, no soft, weak, effeminate indulgence become those who are called with so great a calling. No, no! we must rise to the height of our spiritual manhood. We must remember who we are and to whom we belong; and when trial next comes, instead of complaining like a puling child, or turning back like a craven coward, we must look up for grace and "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

XIV.

SINCERITY.

"That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."
—PHIL. i. 10.

THESE words convey a very blessed description of the Christian, and one which, by a spiritual instinct, we feel to be beautiful before we exactly analyse the meaning of the words; just as we may be impressed with the general glory of a landscape, before we have had time to recognise its loveliness in detail. The words follow after two other descriptive features, both of them well worthy of attention. The eminent graces of the Philippian Christians only quickened the prayers of the apostle for them, and in the context he is expressing the object of these prayers. "I pray," says he, "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." The love is the love of Christ, and that love, in proportion as it is deep and sincere, should make us desirous to know more and more of the Master whom we love, confident that the more we know of Christ the more constraining will be our affection for Him.

It is not so with the objects of our human love;

and we are sometimes afraid to look too closely into the little details of character and conduct, lest they should destroy the illusion we entertain of the excellency of the object, and so dispel our affection. There are secrets in the human heart which it is not always well for each other to know. We may feel that, if others know all the foolish, wicked thoughts which flit through head and heart, it would be impossible for them to love us. It is different with Christ: there is no defect in His perfect beauty which needs to be held back. The more closely, the more intimately, we know Him, the more cause we shall find for admiration and love. He is a sun without a spot; a sunshine without a shadow; a perfection without a flaw. Thus the more we love, the more we wish to know of Him; and the more we know of Him, the more we love Him.

Thus love abounds in knowledge, and knowledge in judgment, a more sensitive perception of what is good and blessed, as if the soul's love of Christ, and the constant intercourse with Christ to which it leads, increased its sensitiveness to right and wrong. Just as in human things, where the more a man is accustomed to good music, or grows in the power of appreciating it, in the same degree he is conscious of defects, and intolerant of them; so it is with the soul and God. Or, to take another illustration: have you not at some time been conscious that companionship and intercourse with some person of refined tastes or noble and generous character

have elevated yourself, as unconsciously you caught more or less the reflected influence of your companion? So we cannot be intimate with Christ, and know much of Him, without becoming like Him, as if the very sight of His beauty and perfection reacted on us, as some dull wall or gloomy corner may catch the rays of the sun and be beautified by them. As we look at Him, and think of Him, and talk to Him, and listen to Him, we "behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ Jesus, and are changed into the same image," till, in the better world, we find the words of the apostle fulfilled, "We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Let us look at the graces recommended, and then at the motive presented for their exercise.

I.—The first of the graces recommended is sincerity. The meaning of the word is much the same, as in its common use among ourselves. It is used here in relation to the spiritual perception of what is good and excellent, described in the words immediately preceding. We are not to live by an abstract theory, but by a practical rule. Love must needs be sensitive to all that stands between us and Christ, clouds His face from us and deprives us of the light of His smile, like a land without the sunshine. Love is no fitful thing, content to burn as with tropical heat one day, and

to be cold as with polar frost the next. If the love which was bright and strong yesterday is faint and cold to-day; if we have no sense of peace; if the soul's wings are heavy and unable to soar upwards; if the fire within is faint and feeble, like a flame dying down amid its embers, surely we must cry, "Why art thou vexed, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Is it the sin I did yesterday? the angry words I spoke, the temper I indulged, or the prayer that I neglected, or the Bible that I left unread? Whatever it be, I must think that to be the evil of all evils that stands between my Saviour and me."

From such thoughts comes sincerity of soul. The word literally means that which is brought out in the sunshine, not hid in the shadows that we might not see it, but honestly laid out in the full light of day, as before Him "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." Sincerity! who does not value it and honour it? Insincerity! who does not shrink from the hideous face of that living lie? The one is clear and beautiful as the light: the other, like the misty darkness, full of hidden dangers and pregnant with fear.

Few brighter, loftier epithets can be given to man than this "sincere;" sincere towards ourselves, which is the first spring of all; for how can he be honest towards others who is not honest towards himself? The secret thought of sin which a man crushes down into the depths of his heart, and

will not look at, puts a man wrong with himself, and, therefore, wrong with God and man. Strange as it seems, strange and most melancholy, there is no living thing with which men are so insincere as with the soul within them. What glimpses of ourselves start up now and then before the conscience, and are thrust out of sight again! What secret convictions of truth are there, to which we are wilfully blind! What sights that we will not see! what warning fears that we will not acknowledge! Oh for grace to be sincere with ourselves, that we may see our hearts as we are secretly conscious they are; that we may draw out to the light, and face like honest men the unconfessed secrets of our inner selves.

Sincere with God! not using words which we do not mean, and making professions which have in them no reality; with our lips confessing sins which in our hearts we never mean to give up, and making promises which we never mean to keep. Were it possible that we should treat a fellow-man as we treat God, we should hate ourselves for our treachery. What wonder that prayer has no answer for us, and the Bible no lessons, and religion no power, and Christ no beauty, and faith no light to throw over life, nor strength to remove the sting from death, when there is no reality in the heart, no truth on the lips!

Sincere with our fellow-men! for he who is honest with himself and honest with God will be honest also with others. The world's hollow shams and false professions, and empty words, and conventional

hypocrisies, compliments that mean nothing, and words as idle and empty as the winds, what has he to do with them who lives beneath the eye of God, and sees things in the light of judgment and the world to come?

Here comes in the second grace recommended. He that is sincere will be also "without offence." For of all the scandals that injure Christ and make men's souls stumble, Christian insincerity is the greatest. The expression "without offence," may mean either not giving offence to others, or not taking offence oneself; not making other men to stumble, or not stumbling in one's own walk. It is used in the first sense in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, "Giving none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." The two meanings are really one, for the person who does not stumble himself will not cause other persons to stumble. The man who gives no cause of offence to others must walk uprightly himself. That man will be void of offence, who honestly presents himself to other men just as he is—a poor sinful man, no angel, but a man with all the infirmities and temptations of a man strong upon him, earnestly following Christ, and endeavouring to be like Him, but held back by the weakness of the flesh and the subtleties of sin. And he will be of all men least liable to fall himself who bears both his ruin and his redemption, both his weakness and his strength, both himself and his sorrow, constantly in mind. I do not mean that he

can become a spotless saint; I do not mean that he will find no weaknesses or experience no stumbling; for who is there that lives and sinneth not? I do not mean that he will become faultless, even to the eyes of the world. The keen eye of human malice will find many an inconsistency in the Christian, as it sought to find them, but failed, in the Christian's Master. But I do mean that such a man will not stumble that he should fall, for grace will hold him up, and the tender hand of his sympathising Master will be there to help him. I do mean that such a man will give no just cause of scandal to the world as he proves himself to be what he is—a man, not sinless, but ever struggling against sin; a pure, true, honest, guileless man, ever reaching up and on, and seeking more and more to realise the saintly character, "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

II.—Let us look at the motive presented to us; and a strong motive we need. Who among us must not be conscious of defects we might supply, and of sins we might avoid, if we were honest to ourselves and faithful to our Master? The motive is suggested in the words, "till the day of Christ." Till that day comes, the Christian's watchfulness must never slumber—his warfare never cease. When it comes, he will need them no more. In the cloudless sunshine that lies beyond, the last lingering touch of falsehood will be lost in the everlasting joy, and the soul itself be pure and clear and spotless as the unclouded blue

of heaven. The motive is a strong one; for that day cannot be very far distant. If Christ should still delay His coming, and in mercy forbear to break in glory upon an unprepared world, still to each man the conflict will end with this brief life of ours. There will be four score years at best, and God knows how much less, and then the day! We cry, Watcher of the night, gird up thy loins, lo, the distant morning is already breaking in the east. Be patient a little while longer of the imperfect knowledge and half-seen dangers of the twilight, and then will come rest and life, and heaven and God.

There can, I think, be no question that the expression refers to the close of the present dispensation, and to the final establishment of the kingdom of our Master. It is one of the many passages which correct our ordinary conceptions of the last day, and are calculated to dissipate the overwhelming terror and awe with which we are mistakenly accustomed to regard it. We know it as the day of judgment, and think of it as one of fear. But here it is regarded as one of joy, for it is the day of the Lord Christ. It is the day of His exaltation and triumph; the day when we shall see, as we have never seen Him yet, the very face and form of Jesus, girt indeed with majesty, and brighter than a thousand suns; but the self-same Jesus whom we have known and loved, who was born, and lived, and died for us; the selfsame who sat at the table at Cana, and wept over the grave at Bethany; we shall see Him, and our joy

will be increased by seeing Him in His glory. The last accent of blasphemy, the last utterance of doubt or disbelief, the last sound of sin—those grating discords of the moral world which pain our very souls, will all be gone, and every tongue will swell the universal welcome. It will be the day when He will gather together His jewels. He Himself, in His own beauty and blessedness, will be the living centre of them, and the sight of Him will be life and heaven.

There is, indeed, another side of the picture, an aspect of the justice that avenges, as well as the justice that rewards. But with this the Christian has nothing to do. Let him leave it to his Master. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? For us the thought of that judgment day is a thought of triumph. Through the midst of the darkness we watch for its approach, when the last shadow shall disappear from a redeemed world, and doubt, and fear, and conflict, and falsehood, and pain, and tears, and death will be for ever gone in the day of Christ.

Surely, then, we should learn a loftier ambition for a closer walk with God; a firmer desire for more likeness to Him; a stronger patience to do and bear and wait; a higher resolution to fling away in the strength of the Spirit of God all that is false and mean and base, that we may walk as saints should walk, commanding the respect even of the world as we pass through life "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

XV.

TENDERNESS OF DESIRE.

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."—PSALM lxxiii. 25.

THERE is great tenderness in these words, and when we examine the context, and realise the circumstances under which they were uttered and the motive which they express, we find no difficulty in understanding them by the light of our own familiar experience. For in our relations towards our earthly loved ones our feelings are never more deeply moved, the outpouring of our affection is never more free and spontaneous, than when we are conscious of having wronged them, even for a moment, by some misapprehension or mistake. The well of love, checked for a moment at its spring, gushes forth the next moment the more impetuously for the momentary check, while the gentle self-reproach gives pathos to our expression of it. There can be few indeed who in some of the relationships of earthly love will not have had occasion to use words of the same character as my text, and with the same emotion, only in a degree as much less as human relationships are inferior to the Divine. At such times we are strictly in sympathy with the writer of these words.

In the earlier part of the Psalm he explains how he had been led to misapprehend God, and to think ungratefully and untruly of His goodness. The occasion was one which has ever tested the faith of God's people. It was the apparent prosperity of the wicked. "I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Then he describes their health, their freedom from afflictive troubles, their pride and pomp, their corruption of manners, their spirit of oppression, their growing riches, and setting the full picture before himself, he was disposed to complain of the inequality and injustice of God's dealings. Why should we serve God, if God leaves those who serve Him to suffering and affliction, while He pampers His enemies with the bounteous gifts of His Providence? "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." He describes the struggles of his soul in solving this problem, which has exercised thousands of men's hearts in every age of the world.

At last, when engaged in prayer, the answer flashed upon his mind. He saw that God's leaving these men alone to themselves was the sign of His displeasure, and not of His love; that it was but the prelude of a swift judgment, which should strike them down at last into a ruin the deeper for the height of their previous pride. He saw, on the other side, that it is out of very love that God chastises His people, just as an earthly parent, out of tender concern, endeavours to correct a child's faults with

which, if he had no love for the child, he would not take the trouble to deal. And now he hated himself for his misapprehension. He to complain!—he who could say, "I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand: Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory"—he to complain! He loathed his own folly, and could not find words strong enough to express it. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee." And then, in the tenderness of his repentant love, he poured out his feelings in the passionate pathos of the text: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

May the Spirit of God graciously help me while I endeavour to analyse the elements of the emotion expressed in these words.

I.—They express a conscious necessity, which God alone is competent to meet. The words thus resemble those of St. Peter. When many of the disciples went back from the Lord and walked no more with Him, after the discourse upon eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and the Lord asked Peter, "Will ye also go away?" that apostle replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." We should greatly mistake the words, if we thought them no more than the expression of a necessity which compelled him to keep with Christ against his will. They are rather

the acknowledgment that the apostle's whole heart and soul were completely bound up with his Master. So it is with the words of the text. I do not mean that they express a selfish desire to get something which God alone could give him; they are far different —namely, the expression of the most devoted love. But this we shall see afterward. For the present I treat them as the expression of conscious want, which God alone could satisfy.

Need I say how many are the necessities of human nature, and how inadequate it is to meet them of itself? I know that there is a false independence in the world, just as there is a true one. Some men think to contain their own strength and happiness within themselves, but very little reflection and experience prove how futile the idea is. I believe that no man lives, who is self-sufficing. Or if such a man is to be found, the result is only gained by denying and resisting and crushing out of sight many wants of the human soul. There are, indeed, artificial luxuries and habits we are enabled to deny and to renounce; and this is right. For true contentment, true happiness, consists not in enlarging our means beyond our wants, but in confining our wants within our means. But to conquer an artificial taste is one thing; to suppress a natural want of the immortal soul is another. To control the appetites of the body may be as true and noble, as it is false and ignoble to resist the cravings with which the soul of man reaches out after unseen and eternal things. This is

to strip ourselves of our nobility, and to lower our nature—not raise it,—lower it beneath what God intended it to be. The real, true wants of man are many and various, and none of these should be denied. That only can suffice for us which meets them all and satisfies them all, just as the sun not only warms all the earth, but decks it with colour and clothes it with brightness and with beauty; or as the flowing river at one and the same time bears the commerce of the nations, gives beauty to the landscape, makes music with its running waters, and crowns the spreading plains with fertility and plenty. Thus only that suffices for man, which meets all the wants of man.

There is but one who is all-sufficient, and that is God. We need society and affection, we need companionship and help, we need a competent supply of things necessary for life and for enjoyment; and it is possible that man may give them to us. But when I have said this, I have mentioned pretty nearly all that man can give. We need for our bodies life and health, and preservation from all those subtle diseases of which the seeds float in the very air we breathe, lading the atmosphere with poison; but who can give these but God? The fondest love may watch, and the most agonising despair that mortal hearts can feel may grieve, over the fading flower of childhood, or the decaying blossom of manly strength or womanly beauty; but not all the love of human nature, not all the skill and wealth and power of the

world, can keep the light in that closing eye, or the life in that heart whose slow and intermittent pulse shows that it will very shortly stop for ever. Stepping from the body into the circle of our outward home, we need some friend who shall control for us the shifting changes and chances of the world, and rule life's precarious fortunes, laying to rest those many fears which, if we cannot place them on some mightier shoulders than our own, vex the heart in the prospect of vicissitudes which it can neither foresee nor prevent. Who can do this but God?

Then if we turn to the world within, we need some one to calm that dreadful sense of sin which, deep down in the secret recesses of the heart, ever haunts the human conscience, warning it that something is wrong between it and God, and clothing death with a terror that is insupportable, and from which we fly to every passing folly which will keep us from thinking. Where shall we find this friend but in God, who has provided a means of calming our fears in the great atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which He has borne once for all the sins and penalties of a guilty world? And then we need some power which shall decide the struggle between sin and conscience, shall allay the passions of a corrupted nature, and enable us to do what we believe to be right in loving and serving God, quieting the inward storm as the "Peace, be still," of the God-Man quieted the furious winds and tossing waves of the Galilean sea. And then we need some object

to fill and satisfy a nature which God has made too great and noble to rest content in anything less than Himself, and which never can find happiness till, in a Divine contentment, it reposes on the assurance of pardon, and on the love of a present Deity. And, lastly, we need some one to support us in trouble, comfort and sustain us in death, and welcome us into the everlasting rest. Who shall do all this but God? Oh the folly of looking to any but to Him! Oh, for grace to look up, and, resting all our hopes and cares above, exclaim with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee?"

II.—The words further imply strong and absorbing love for God. All the apparent self-regard, which I have already said to be expressed by them, is elevated and sanctified by this Divine affection. As on the one side Christ gave Himself for us, so we, with a self-abandoning affection, give ourselves back to Him. The necessities of men constitute the first link of the chain of reciprocal affection, for all the dealings of God have sprung out of them, and are directed to meet them. Had there been no fall, there would have been no redemption; if no sin, no salvation; if no lost paradise, no restored heaven; if no weaknesses and wants, no Divine bounty in meeting them. Thus our needs came first. Then came the supply, when God spared not His only begotten Son, and gave us all other things in Him. Then

comes the love in return, learned beneath the cross, and quickened by the Spirit of God,—love which counts all things in the whole world to be loss for "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

This love, be it observed, is not the mere love of a hireling, who loves for what he gets, and like the dog that fawns upon the hand that feeds him, is bought by the benefits he receives. It is not so: we love the Lord, not for His gifts, but for Himself. Not His, but He, is the object of our affection. We should not have known Him but for His gifts, and especially that inestimable and priceless gift of His own blessed and holy Self. But His gifts lead us up to Himself, as the rays lead back to the sun out of which they emanate. His holiness, His truth, the personal perfections of His spotless character, His benevolent compassion, His generous and tender considerateness, His boundless sympathy, and in and through all these His immeasurable and infinite love, win and conquer us, till, subdued by His grace and captivated with His beauty, we cry with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

There is a caution suggested by these latter words, which I must not pass over unnoticed. We are not to suppose, that there is any necessary opposition between the love of Christ and the love of our fellow-beings. I know that the two do come into collision; but it is not of God's doing, but of our own. It is

only because we put the love of our earthly friends out of its place that we make it inconsistent. We put the love of man first, and then all is wrong. The heart narrowed and contracted with its earthly objects has no room for God. Put the love of Christ first, and then all is right. The heart enlarged with the love of God loves man also; ay, and loves with truth, depth, tenderness, and sincerity unknown to the selfishness of our unregenerate nature. This was the Psalmist's meaning: not that he renounced all other affection, and separated himself from the love of his kind. God calls us to do no such thing; nay, He forbids it. For when men fancy that they can be holier by leading a life of loneliness and seclusion, such as the life of monks and nuns, most falsely called the "religious life," what they do is this,—they imagine they can serve God better in their own way, than in God's way; that they can please Him by running away from the duties He has called them to do, rather than by seeking grace and strength from Him to do them. This is a most monstrous and dangerous mistake; as if the world was not in every man's heart, and as if we did not carry it about with us. To get rid of the world we must get rid of ourselves, and we can only lose ourselves when we find Christ.

The Psalmist had no such idea. What he meant was, that he loved the Lord more than all the world beside, and, if needs be, was prepared to give up all the world beside for the Lord's sake. Occasions

of testing this are not unknown in life. They came to the apostles, when they were called to leave all and follow in the footsteps of their Master. They were set before the early Christians, when they were called to give up father, mother, home, family, and friends, for the Lord's sake, just as in heathen lands many a convert is called to do in our own day. They came to the martyrs, when they counted not their life dear unto them, so that they might finish their course with joy. They come to us, when we are tempted to be so occupied with the cares, and riches, and pleasures of the world as to be in danger of forgetting our souls, and God, and death, and the world to come; or when it is made a test of sincerity that we should please some earthly friend by displeasing God; or should follow the world's fashion at the cost of crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame. In all such cases the question comes: Whom do we love best? Oh, for grace to answer without hesitation, to answer from the bottom of our hearts,—"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

XVI.

THE SERVICE OF THE BODY.

"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."—1 COR. vi. 18–20.

THE thoughts and anxieties of an unconverted man are naturally concerned first and foremost with the body. The higher part of him, the soul, and the world to come, are put out of sight, and the wants, interests, and pleasures of the flesh occupy the attention. I do not mean by the body the mere gratifications of vicious passions, but I mean the entire range of wants, interests, pleasures, and affections, which meet and centre in the flesh. When a man is converted this prominence of the flesh is changed. The soul within him is suddenly called, by the work of the Spirit of God, into life and activity. He becomes conscious of inward feelings and emotions so strong, intense, and vivid as to concentrate attention upon themselves. Great changes are to be wrought. In the soul is the seat of sin. There the grace of God is to do its work. There are to be

washed out the stains of guilt; there to be renewed the image and likeness of God. Hence the soul now takes, in the man's thoughts, the predominant place formerly occupied by the body. He also cares so much more for spiritual pleasures, and fixes his affection so pre-eminently upon God, that he is willing to deny the body for the sake of the soul, and, if need be, like the martyrs of ancient times, even to sacrifice bodily life altogether for the sake of the Saviour.

All this is right, and good, and necessary. Yet it is possible that even this may be pushed too far. While the soul is first, the body is not therefore to be neglected. There may be a false spirituality which omits the body too much from its thoughts, and which is fixed so exclusively upon the service of the heart as to overlook the service which, even the flesh may, and should, render unto the God who made it. Because the outward holiness of the body is worthless without the inward holiness of the heart, it does not follow that the inward holiness of the heart is complete without the outward holiness of the body. This is a lesson we may well learn from the text. It was written indeed with a somewhat different reference; for under the ancient idolatry fornication was esteemed no sin; it was, therefore, not easy for men born and bred in that error all at once to appreciate the stricter morality of the Gospel. The charge to "flee fornication" was therefore very necessary in such a notorious place as Corinth; unfortunately, it is not unnecessary among profess-

ing Christian people now. But the truth itself is wider than its application. I therefore propose to use the words as showing the general position which the body, and the habits of the body, ought to have in the character and conduct of a Christian. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are His."

I omit the other subjects suggested by the text, and ask you to consider, first, the dignity of the body, and then the service of the body.

I.—The dignity of the body. The apostle speaks in the accents of surprise, as if astonished that Christian men and women should underrate the preciousness of any part of them. It is not that the soul is to be excluded, for it is the best and highest, but that the flesh is to be included. "What? know ye not?" as if to imply that they ought to know, and indeed did know, and only needed to call to mind their knowledge in order to guide their conduct. Many considerations may commend the sanctification of the flesh to God, not to dwell on that natural care for our bodies, which is too much identified with our experience to make it necessary that I should dwell upon it. For instance, the possibility that the angels in glory may have bodies more nearly resembling our own than we are apt to

imagine, since every angelic appearance recorded in Scripture has been in human shape, may give us higher notions of it, than we are apt to gather from the sin-stricken and mortal condition in which alone we see the body in ourselves. Or we might look at the fact that the Son of God Himself ascended to heaven in a body of "flesh and bones," thus consecrating it to our human thoughts. Or, advancing still, we might argue, from the fact that the flesh as well as the spirit is included in His redeeming work, that in the bright heaven for which we look there will be glory and happiness of the body as well as glory and happiness of the soul. All these thoughts might teach us that religion has its claims upon the body, and that even the dull flesh is to become a well-tuned instrument ever sounding praise and glory unto God.

But the apostle, in the text, takes yet higher ground, and appeals, not to the glory of the body hereafter, but to the honour of the body even here, even now, amid the pains and wearinesses and weaknesses of our mortal and earthly state. The body of a Christian man is already great—already claimed and taken possession of by the God who has redeemed it—already to be treated with the same respect with which a heathen would regard the temple of his idol, or a Jew the Holy of Holies of the Jehovah-God of his forefathers. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" The reference is to each one, as the temple of the Holy Ghost;

and as the Holy Ghost is Himself one with the Father and the Son, God blessed for evermore, so the body is the very temple and dwelling-place of Deity.

I need scarcely remind you that this is not true of all men. It is not spoken of all, but only of those who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." It is true that the body is fearfully and wonderfully made in all. It is true that there dwells within it, in each man, an immortal soul full of noble gifts, originally made in the image of God, and possessed of powers to suffer and to enjoy far beyond what we now experience. It is true that this body and this soul are not even now empty things in any man, not buildings void and desolate, but that each one is actuated and moved by a power beyond and above himself. But in natural men that power is not the power of God, but of God's enemy. They are the members and instruments of unrighteousness, not of holiness; servants of sin, not of God. Given up to work Satan's will here, they will suitably share with him the agony of the deathless worm and quenchless fire hereafter. It is of Christians alone that it can be said that their bodies are the members of Christ and the temple of the indwelling Holy Ghost.

Now the idea of temple implies presence. In the temples of idolatry there was a visible shape, Bel or Dagon or some other hideous and abhorrent figure, to represent the spirit supposed to be present there.

In the Temple of God at Jerusalem there was indeed no figure, because God Himself was there; and it was His express command that no similitude should ever be made of Him who is a Spirit, and whom the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain. But even there, in the first Temple at all events, the visible Shekinah, or glory of God, dwelt above the mercy-seat. God is not absent from His own dwelling-place. Thus if the body be the temple of the Holy Ghost it must be because He is actually there, within the tabernacle of flesh. Just think, what a solemn thought that within this body of ours is the Holy Ghost, going where we go, staying where we stay; the gracious companion of all our daily life!

In the idea of a temple there is even more than this. He is present in the body,—not by permission, but by right. A temple ever implies exclusive dedication to the deity who dwells in it. Thus it is not that we ought from reverence (or, may I say out of courtesy?) to render to God the use of a body which is our own, but it is that God assumes the use of a body which is His own, not ours. He only claims His right, and enters into possession. We are not our own, but His, bought with a price. The language of Scripture elsewhere fixes indisputably what this price is: "We have been redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." We were God's by creation, and

the right of property thus derived still exists, and will be asserted at the judgment. But that right we have denied, so far as concerns our will, and have given to Satan that which is really God's. The Spirit of the Most High will not come back into a body where Satan's seat is, and where he dwelleth. He will not by force take the flesh, while the heart and affections are bestowed elsewhere. But when His grace has won the heart back again, and the poor soul, stricken with its contrite sense of sin, has washed its guilt away in the blood of the covenant, and, captivated with a Divine love, has flung itself for peace before the cross of the saving Jesus, then God comes back to His own and takes full possession of the entire man,—body, soul, spirit, and all. The very flesh is consecrated by the Divine presence. It walks through life, wonderful is the God who inhabits it; and when death comes, it is only that the tabernacle may be taken down below to be rebuilt above, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Try to realise it, and the force of motive which this fact supplies for holiness and purity. If ever the law of sin in the members rebels against the law of the mind; if the wants of the poor flesh begin to crave more than is their due; if its weaknesses dispose us to be too indulgent to it, and not to keep it under and bring it into subjection; if its tastes and affections are in danger of leading us into sin, with what awakening power does the warning voice come unto us, and

remind us of our obligations, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

II.—The service of the body. The Christian who thus thinks of his flesh as the temple of God cannot fail to acquire a higher respect for it, a nobler estimate of what God made it for and intends it to be, a loftier appreciation of its value, not as a mere garment to be cast away at death, but as a vessel of immortality. He will therefore treat his flesh with more regard, and will govern and rule it on better principles. He will no longer seek to satisfy all its present desires, treating it as men sometimes treat children, making it their object to keep them quiet, and for that purpose to indulge them in any foolish gratification; but he will endeavour to make it useful to its Lord, and, looking forward to its future glory, will seek to prepare it for its inheritance.

It is evident that this higher respect will show itself in small things as well as in great, and will affect the whole bodily habits of a man from end to end. The conduct of unconverted men is merely ruled by bodily pleasures. The flesh and its gratifications form the great governing motives. Yet what do such men really do for their body, and into what state do they bring it? Follow the drunkard or the profligate, who abuse their natural health and strength, by sin,

and see if the result be not neglect of the body, and misery and suffering in the very flesh they pamper. Why, look at that drunken fellow, with his red and bleared eyes, and sunken cheek, and tottering walk. His very flesh is sodden with the drink, and the cheek, which should be flushed with the clear hue of health, is thick and cloudy to the eye, as if the drink became visible in the face. Look at him as he lounges about in the intervals of work or on the Sunday, dirty and unwashed, from the uncombed head to the untidy foot, with every slouching movement, every wretched rag about him, a disgrace to his manhood. Or follow him home, and what of bodily comfort is there in that untidy room, that wretched, broken furniture, those black walls, and that scanty meal? Does that man respect his body, think you, or respect himself?

No; let the grace of God change that man's heart, and what a difference is seen! Observe, the mere appetites of the body are controlled; and, under the control, the body itself flourishes; the ruddy hue of health mantles the cheeks, the firmness returns to his step, and the vigour to his limbs. He no longer fears to look you in the face, but stands upright before all men, the honest man he is, the noblest work of God. We look at him, clean and tidy, decent and honourable, the object of general respect. Now he holds his head erect and takes his place among his fellow-men in the house of God, or, within his happy and comfortable home, gathers wife and children round his knees to read the Word of God, or

offer the united prayer to their Father who is in heaven. That man respects himself, therefore he respects his very body. He knows that it is not his own, but God's, entrusted to him to rule; and he keeps it as God's work and God's property should be kept. It is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and its condition must be worthy of its inhabitant.

Thus, therefore, we should keep our bodies:—

A.—We should jealously watch, lest they be polluted with sin. We must keep them in soberness and chastity, in the sight of God and man. We need a great improvement in public feeling and sentiment even here, especially among young men and young women. There is a wretched habit in some persons of regarding vice as a misfortune instead of a crime; whereas it is a crime, not a misfortune; an evil fruit growing naturally out of religious carelessness and neglect. When fathers and mothers are not seen to walk in God's ways, but despise God's fear and love, what wonder if their children go wrong; and when they go wrong, surely the disgrace belongs to them all in common; and the general feeling and opinion of a community ought not to shrink from asserting it.

B.—Respect for the body, as the temple of the Holy Ghost, should teach propriety of dress and manner, and even of bodily appearance. A real, and delicate, and self-respecting tidiness and order at all times becomes the Christian, not only when seen of others, but when seen by God alone. Not that un-

certain caprice, which is alternately as much too fine at one time as it is too squalid at another, becomes a Christian. A saved body, destined for heaven, is neither to be neglected nor to be made into an idle gewgaw, flaunting in empty show, but is to be treated with the sober and serious propriety which becomes a house of God and the God who fills it.

C.—We need to watch over all our habits, so as to keep the body in the fittest state possible to do God's will. We are not made to be idle, but to work for God. This is the highest object of health, that the members may be instruments of righteousness unto holiness. No self-indulgence, no unbecoming luxury, no use of God's creatures beyond the strictest bounds of temperance, should unfit us for our Master's service. We are God's, body and spirit, and God must have His own.

D.—The lesson includes the due use and place of the body in our worship of God. The real seat of prayer or worship is in the heart, and if that be untouched by the Holy Ghost, all else is but a mockery and an abomination. But when the heart is right, the body must share the service. They both come from God, both belong to God, and to God they must both be rendered back again. Hence arises the propriety of outward forms of worship, of the bended knees, the uplifted hands, the uttered words, the external visible reverence of manner and gesture in the presence of God. We should pay this reverence to an earthly king ; how much more to the King of

kings! I do not mean to encourage that meek and affected reverence which degenerates into a mere performance of bows, and gestures, and prostrations, bending and stooping, according to a programme; which, to my mind, does but interrupt devotion and dishonours the spiritual God,—but I mean the bodily outgoing of the reverence within; that attentive solemnity of the flesh which is the result of the devotion of the heart. All careless, inattentive, wandering indifference of manner in Divine worship is simply monstrous. Let the people of God give to the flesh its proper place; and if they are tempted to be careless of the outward form let them remember the words, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

XVII.

THE SWEETNESS OF MEDITATION.

"My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord."
—PSALM civ. 34.

THE first thing needed is clearly to understand what meditation is, what is the act which the word describes. This is the more necessary because the whole habits and manners of modern life run in an opposite direction, and are replete with evils of which meditation is the natural corrective. None will doubt that we live in the midst of great hurry and excitement. In common phrase, we live fast, and crowd into hours what, in previous periods, would have occupied days. In the mere course of business there is great pressure (as must ever be the case where a large number of small profits make up the whole income) and immense competition. Those who live by the labour of their hands probably feel less of this pressure than any other class, for with them the tendency is to shorten hours of labour, and to increase rate of pay. But with all other classes there is an incessant pressure of feverish haste, involving great wear and tear both of mind and body. The tendency extends from the business of the world into its

pleasures, and even into the general habits of social life. The very children of our day have lost the relish for the simple and quiet enjoyments of days gone by, and must be excited by some form of outward amusement. The whole tendency is unhealthy, and perilous in the extreme. It is dangerous to moral steadiness of character and to solidity of intellect. But, above all, it is dangerous to religious principle, and to the faith which looks beyond the seen and temporal, and rests on the unseen and the eternal.

Nay, more, even when by the grace of God the soul has been converted and taught to seek its treasure on the other side of the grave, the characteristic hurry and excitement of our age are exceedingly injurious to the growth of Christian graces. They discourage habits of devotion, and cut down within the narrowest limits the time devoted to prayer. They are fatal to that quiet repose of heart which befits one whose mind is stayed upon God. They throw into the background the smaller duties and conflicts of a Christian life, great and heroic as many of them really are. They leave no time for quiet and patient thought, either in the examination of our own hearts, or in that sustained exercise of the mind whereby alone grand truths can be adequately appreciated. This tendency we need especially to recognise. For the weakness of human nature a mere hasty glance at truth is not sufficient; it neither makes an impression deep enough to abide, nor does it fully measure what is submitted to it.

Why, even with an earthly landscape, a far-reaching sea, a majestic mountain, or a range of snow-capped hills with their sharp white edges in relief against the deep blue sky, we need to look and look again, before we are conscious of the beauty and glory of the sight. With a picture, we must sit down and study it before we can realise the true relation of the several parts, and each object appears in its proper form and place. With a building, we need to go round it and view it from all sides, before we appreciate its dignity and proportion.

Now what this act of looking and looking again is to an outward object, that meditation is to a spiritual truth. It is the calm and quiet dwelling of the mind upon a great fact, till the fact has time to get into the mind and pervade it with its influence. It is not to be confounded, therefore, with an active process of reasoning when the mind passes, link by link, from premise to conclusion. Still less is it to be confounded with mere idle musing, that passive day-dreaming which is but the license of an ungoverned imagination. Meditation is the quiet thinking on single truths; the dwelling of the mind upon them; the steady setting of attentive thought, drawn away from other things, and concentrated on this alone.

This is meditation; and how little it enters into our familiar habits all must be painfully conscious. Yet it is inculcated upon us both by precept and by example. Thus, St. Paul, speaking of the great work of the apostleship, bids Timothy "meditate on

these things; give thyself wholly to them." Thus we have the example of the Psalmist, presented over and over again in the language of his psalms, but culminating in the happy expression of the text, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet."

May the Spirit of God graciously assist us with His enlightening and quickening influences while we examine into the elements of this meditation, and consider how it may be made as sweet to ourselves, as it was to the Psalmist of old.

I.—I observe that the words imply a personal relationship—that is, the relation of the human person who thinks towards a Divine Person on whom he meditates. All through the psalm, from end to end, it is not a thing, nor an abstract truth, but a living being who is presented. The Psalmist speaks of things indeed. The objects from which he derives illustrations of the glory of God are taken from the realm of nature, although it is evident to a sanctified intellect that the writer uses the wonders of nature to express the yet deeper wonders of grace. He speaks of the glories of the sky; but it is God who covereth Himself with light, who maketh the clouds His chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind. He describes the spreading landscape, with the green hills and fertile valleys, rich with the olive and the vine, musical with the running stream, and filled with the sound of happy life from the birds of the air to the browsing herd: but it is God who send-

eth the springs into the valleys, and watereth the hills, and bringeth food out of the earth. He celebrates the marvellous order of the world and all its wise contrivances, with sun and moon, and day and night, all in their course. But it is that he may exclaim, "O Lord, how marvellous are Thy works, in wisdom hast Thou made them all." All through it is the personal living God whom the Psalmist saw, the God who thought, and felt, and schemed, and ruled, and loved, and with whom the Psalmist himself was brought into relation. This is remarkable. Not an abstract or distant Deity is He who calls out the adoration of His human creatures, but one in whom we live and move and have our being, round about our path, and about our bed, and searching out all our ways.

I do not mean that the mind may not find delight in contemplating the works of God, and in tracing out the wonders of creation, apart from our personal interest in them. To a Christian there is infinite delight in it because he is a Christian, and sees a Father's hand in everything. I admit, that those who have not this interest in God may yet find pleasure in the contemplation of creation. But this pleasure will mainly be that of the head, and such deep emotions of joy as the Psalmist's words express would not be evoked by the contemplation of an abstract Deity, with whom we have nothing whatever to do. It is our own relation to Him, which brings Him to our hearts. Thus, in the verse immediately preceding the text, the Psalmist calls Him, "my

God;" "I will sing praise to my God while I have my being." The expression is full of happy faith and childlike trust. Can we not understand, how it must have been sweet to meditate on the power and wisdom and goodness of God, when that God was a Friend and Father, pledged by every gracious attribute to defend and keep His own? Sweeter yet should our meditation be, in proportion as our knowledge is greater, and the acts of love on which we have to dwell are more marvellous.

But the ground of joy must be the same to us as it was to the Psalmist. We see God not only as Creator, but as Redeemer. Even as Creator we see Him far more perfectly than the Psalmist did, in proportion as modern science has revealed to us more perfectly the wonders of earth and of heaven, and has laid open the secrets of the deep sea. But it is in redemption that we see God best. In the cradle of Bethlehem, where the only-begotten Son of the Father took flesh; in the cross of Calvary, on which He died bearing the penalty of our sins; and in the sure prospect of His coming again to gather together His people, and to reign in righteousness, we see God in the flesh. On that personal God we fix our hearts —a real person, feeling, thinking, living, with a real body like our own, and a real human soul, and a real experience, and a real affection for us. Christianity is Christ. We never can remember this too constantly. Not the doctrine, but Himself; not the Book, but the august Jesus, whose grand figure fills it from Genesis

to Revelation; not the Church, but He in whom the Church believes—Jesus Himself, with none between the soul and Him; Jesus, with a warm heart beating true to other hearts—Jesus is our all in all.

Truly it will ever be sweet to think of Him if we can use the appropriating word "*my*,"—"my Jesus," "my Saviour,"—but not otherwise. A Saviour denied, rejected, dishonoured, blasphemed, can be no subject of pleasant thought; and all the less if we know that He is crowned and throned, and only waits the appointed time to call us into judgment. If the unwelcome thought of Him brings repentance, it is well; but if there be no repentance, and therefore no forgiveness and no hope, the thought of Him never can be sweet. Let Him become ours, known, trusted, loved, appreciated; and then, but not till then, shall we be able to say with the Psalmist, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet."

II.—Having thus observed the personal relation of the meditator towards the object of his meditation, let us see whence comes the sweetness of this exercise of the head and heart. Here I shall venture to leave the actual writer of the psalm, whoever he may have been, out of sight, and to look to ourselves alone; for the experience the Psalmist had and the experience we have is the same, only the joys of it are the more rich and abundant with ourselves in proportion to our fuller knowledge of the saving love of God. The subject of our meditation is Christ, and

I shall assume that we who meditate know and love Him, have washed our sins away in His blood, have taken Him to be our Master, and can call Him our Saviour and our God. I venture to ask, then, why it is sweet to meditate with Him?

It is sweet to think of the love of Christ, and especially to realise that we, with all our conscious unworthiness, are the objects of it. That love is wonderful in itself, wonderful in its freedom and spontaneity, wonderful in its eternal duration, wonderful in the depth of suffering it led our Lord to endure, wonderful in the tenderness and affectionate sympathies of His heart towards the wants and weaknesses of His people. Who could ever have conceived, out of his own heart, of God taking flesh like that of His own creatures, and stooping to death, even the death of the cross? We are all the happier and better for knowing the revelation of such a love. Just as we have pleasure in looking at anything that is beautiful, and are richer for having seen it, so the soul is raised by the grander conception of what love is, which the work of Christ enables us to form. But especially is it sweet to realise the fact that that love is exercised towards each one of us. Is there not pleasure in being loved, even by a human being? Do we not rise in our self-respect from the consciousness that some one, at all events, cares for us? Is not this the peculiar charm of home? But here it is the Son of God who loves us, as the apostle has taught us to say, "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

In proportion as we lie, conscience-stricken and heart-broken with the sense of sin before the judgment seat of God, it becomes sweeter and sweeter yet to say, "I am poor and guilty, but the Lord careth for me." It needs the language of heaven to tell of the blessedness of being saved, the assurance of acceptance with God, the happy confidence, the deep peace, the calm inward joy; but who shall tell the love that has saved us, or measure that which is as long as eternity and infinite as God?

Again, it is sweet to dwell on the love-tokens of our absent Saviour—that is, absent as yet in His flesh; for, in the omnipresence of His Deity and in the efficacy of His atoning offices, who will ever forget His words?—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." But in bodily presence, the presence of the glorified flesh which the Lord took into union with His Deity, He is as yet absent; for He is in heaven, and eye cannot see Him nor hand touch Him. Yet is it not sweet to dwell upon the tokens of love that pass between us and Him, and assure us of His undying recollection of His people? This, too, is an earthly experience. If a loved one be far parted from us, have we not pleasure in the letters which tell us of constant love and undying affection? Yet what are they to the actual intercourse, daily maintained between Christ and His people? Can we not tell Him of our love in prayer and praise? What are the songs with which we sing His glory, what our ascriptions of praise, what our prayers, what the unspoken longings of our souls

after Him but the messages of our affection? And does He not speak to us? What is the written Word, but the treasure-house of His promises? what the Spirit who brings it home to us and moves our hearts with His inward convictions, but the immediate messenger of His grace? What are the sacraments but meeting-places with Christ, the salutations of His mercy and His love? Is it not sweet to think of the bonds which knit us together with Him in a union indissoluble as His immutable promises?

Lastly, is it not sweet to anticipate the time when we shall meet Him, "whom, not having seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?" We shall see Him face to face in the reality of His presence, and dwell with Him for ever. Oh, it was blessed to have seen Him even in the days of His humiliation, when the fulness of the Godhead was veiled in human form; but what will it be to see Him in His glory! When the time of His final triumph comes, He will be revealed as the centre of a redeemed and rejoicing world. We have the promise of it, sealed with the immutable oath of Him who cannot lie, changeless as the Yea and Amen of Him, over whom there passeth not the shadow of a change. Is it not sweet to think of it, and to lay to rest in this blessed expectation all the troublous evils and worries and frettings of the earthly conflict? Can we with the Psalmist call Him "my God?" Then with the Psalmist we shall also testify, "My meditation of

XVIII.

PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE.

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."—MATT. vii. 21.

FOR the full understanding of our Lord's celebrated discourse, known to us as the Sermon on the Mount, it is necessary that the religious condition of the world at the time it was delivered should be clearly borne in mind. In all the notions then entertained in regard to God, and to the service and worship due to Him, there was one universal defect. This defect was fundamental; for it had relation to the first primary idea of holiness, and equally affected, therefore, the notion men had of God Himself and of their own duty towards Him. The idea of religious purity and holiness occurs frequently enough in ancient writings, but men have erred in attaching to the words the same idea which they bear with ourselves. In fact, the world, in our Lord's days, knew of no holiness save that which consisted in ceremonial acts and observances, in going through certain forms, offering certain sacrifices, keeping certain festivals; the idea of holiness as an

inward thing, a purifying of the heart and conscience from the stains of natural lusts and passions, was totally, absolutely, unknown to them.

I am conscious of the difficulty to my own mind of realising this, because to us the idea of holiness of heart is familiar, and the idea of holiness being attached to acts is strange and difficult; yet so it was in those days, and how natural it was that it should be so may be understood, from another consideration. It is that the heathen world had no law but that which they derived from their own consciences; and the consciences being themselves corrupted by sin, the law was naturally as false as the consciences from which it was derived were dark. Human nature was, in fact, its own law, as even in modern times some have not scrupled to assert. Hence whatever human nature liked was thought to be right, not wrong; men saw no sin in the indulgence of their passions, because those passions were part of the corrupt nature that they bore. The plain proof of this statement is that all those profligate deeds of lust and vile impurity which we think most abominable, were parts of the religious worship of their deities, and the qualities which we think most detestable were reckoned high among their virtues. The root of the mistake is evident enough, but I must not stop to point it out.

So, however, it was. Men had no conception of an inward holiness, and knew of no purity but what was outward and ceremonial. Such was the condition of the Gentile world. The same thing was un-

happily true even of the Jews, and if I yet pause somewhat over this, it is only because it is the key to every lesson, every verse, almost every word, of this Divine discourse. It ought not to have been so. The Jew ought to have known better, and it was his own fault and sin that he did not know better. For he had a revelation of God, and that revelation presented God as a holy and sin-hating Being, as in the memorable description of His character,—"The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Moreover, all the sacrifices and offerings of the Mosaic law were meant to teach this truth of sin and of holiness, and to awaken the answer to it; so that our Lord expressed His surprise that Nicodemus should be ignorant of the necessity for a great inward change by the Spirit of God. "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" Yet the Jew had totally lost sight of it in an outward ceremonialism that never touched the heart. Hence, frequently in our Lord's ministry, did He assert the inwardness of sin and of holiness.

It is the more necessary for us to bear it in mind, because to regard sin as outward is the characteristic error of the Church of Rome, and lies at the bottom of her system of salvation by sacraments. The whole Sermon on the Mount is directed to the correction of this fatal error, and I think that if you read

it carefully over, with this clue to its meaning closely in mind, you will find a consistent coherence in it, and a height of spirituality of which you may have been previously unconscious. The one object pervades the whole of it. Thus the Jews thought that murder and adultery were solely outward acts. Our Lord taught that the guilt of them is to be found in the imaginations of the heart. They thought that prayer consisted in the number of words uttered and their vain repetition. He taught that it consists in the outgoing and upgoing of the living soul to the living God. They thought themselves holy because they gave alms, and fasted, and made long prayers to be seen of men. He taught them that all deeds that had not reference to God, and did not spring from faith in Him, were abominations. They thought themselves all right because they were popular with the world, and because they were called "Rabbi, Rabbi." He warned them that they must be judged by God, by Him who seeth in secret, but rewardeth openly. They thought that a religion of words and profession was enough. He taught them that it was no better than a house built upon the sand, which amid the floods and winds of an avenging justice would fall and leave them helpless. In short, the dominant thought of the entire Sermon is not indeed the exclusion of the outward, but the necessity for the inward, and it is the clue to the words of my text, as to the rest of it. God is the searcher of hearts—He is the infinite Spirit, and they who would "worship Him

must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

With this principle to guide us, let us proceed to trace the relation of outward obedience to the inward life, and may the good Spirit be the gracious spring of our thought and feeling.

I.—In the first place, outward obedience is the necessary fruit, and the absolute test of inward life. It is in this view that the entire context presents it. Our Lord is not speaking of the meritorious ground of a sinner's acceptance; but of the outward evidences of his state. The immediate reference is to false prophets, whose orders may be regular, but who, by their evil fruits, prove that they have no commission from God. The words directly preceding are, "By their fruits ye shall know them"—as we test a tree by the character and abundance of its produce. The words of the text, however, extend the allusion from ministers to all that live. There is one, and only one, certain evidence of the state of our souls before God, and that is the life. "Tell me not how he died," was the response of an eminent saint to the account of a Christian's deathbed, "but tell me how he lived." Not office, however high, though it gives the power of casting out devils; not profession, however loud and earnest; not belief, however sound and coldly orthodox; not

feeling, however sensitive and tender; not emotion, though it may fill the eyes with tears, and choke the tongue with sobs; not religious phrases, however correct and devout;—not any of these can give the slightest security that we are in Christ Jesus. We may rely upon them, and with confident arrogance may bear ourselves haughtily before the very throne of judgment, but, after all, we shall be smitten and blasted with the words, "Depart from Me, I know ye not, ye workers of iniquity." There is but one test —the obedience of the life. He alone will enter into the kingdom of heaven "that *doeth* the will of My Father which is in heaven."

Let us pause over the words. They cannot refer to the man who accidentally does the will of God, because it so happens that his pleasure coincides with God's pleasure, just as a person may walk in the same path as another without intending to be his companion. In such an act there would be no inward element. But they must refer to the man who intentionally does God's will; does it, that is, because it is God's will; independently of any further consideration of whether it be pleasant or not in itself. It is God's will, and that is to be enough. Observe, therefore, there is no picking and choosing in such an obedience; no disobedience in some things because of obedience in others; no violation of commands we do not happen to like because of our observance of commands we do happen to like; no being amiable because it is our

natural disposition to be so, and worldly because it is our natural disposition to be so, and then setting the one over against the other and calling it piety; but it is to do all that God wills,—the little as well as the great, the difficult as well as the easy, just as the natural sun gilds all the world alike. The word "doeth" does not mean intention, profession, or promise, but action in those practical details of actual life, which make up the real sum total of human existence. A saving religion is not that which is up in the air, but that which plants its sacred feet on the solid earth of daily life. It is that which rules the tongue, regulates the temper, controls the natural irritabilities of the disposition, governs the hand, and directs all the incomings and outgoings of the life. Such a religion is exceedingly difficult, and there is one power alone which can accomplish it in us. It is the power of God. The man who so lives must draw his strength from heaven, and we know that he must be savingly in Christ, before he can receive the Spirit of Christ. To use an inspired illustration, "we are God's workmanship." Not only does an artist's work show the genius of the artist, but every artist has his own touch and style. We look at an exquisite picture, and we recognise the hand of the painter: we exclaim, with undoubting confidence, "Raphael," "Guido," "Rembrandt." Thus when we look at a true Christian who bears and reflects Christ all over him, we say, "God." That is God's work; God's Spirit

alone can have done that. God is "admired in His saints, and glorified in all them that believe."

And how can it be otherwise if we reverse the order, and, instead of looking from the act to the principle, trace the principle down into the act? For what is salvation, but deliverance from sin; and what is sin, but opposition to the will of God? To be saved, therefore, is to be brought into conformity with God's will. What is the end for which the Son of God came into the world, but to restore a fallen race to the inheritance that we have lost? What was the glory of their inheritance, but harmony with the will of God? What is justification, but the union of the soul with Christ? Christ is the Saviour from sin; to be at the same time in Christ and in sin is as contradictory as to be alive and dead at the same time. What is sanctification, but the actual coming of God the Holy Ghost into the heart? A good man is full of the Holy Ghost. But the Holy Ghost can no more abide in a heart without making it holy, without compelling it by the most sweet inward necessity to do God's will, than there can be a sun without light, a stream without water, a summer without flowers, a life without activity. What will glorification be, but the regeneration of a fallen state into its primeval blessedness; and what was the essence of that blessedness, but God all in all? Thus, try the question every way we will, the same result remains. Yet, when we look the truth fairly in the face, what a solemn fact it is. We may

believe the Gospel, and even preach it. We may profess Christ, and even work for Him. We may worship Him, may be moved by religious emotions, and yet not be saved. We may approach, as it were, to the very gates of the celestial world, and yet be shut out after all. Let ministers and those to whom they minister alike learn the lesson, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

II.—But there is another point of view from which the lesson may be regarded. Outward obedience may be, in the hands of the Spirit of God, the instrument of inward life, and therefore, where inward life already exists, the means and stimulant of a higher growth in grace. The desire to do God's will may be a step towards an assured hope in Christ Jesus. God works in the conversion and sanctification of souls very differently, though every avenue of grace converges to one and the same centre in Christ Jesus. On some He works by the terrors of the law; on some by the simple beauty of Christ; on some by the inward experiences of their own heart. The heavenly light may break upon the soul suddenly, as the midday blaze of glory which smote Saul on the way to Damascus, or it may grow gradually, like the progress of the natural day, from the first faint blush of morning as it brightens in the east to the full zenith that flushes creation with meridian light and glory. Thus grace

may work through human effort. Our Lord declared, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

I suppose the case of a man honestly set on doing the will of God. His very purpose of heart, if it be frank and true, is itself of God; but it may be only the first beginning of the spiritual life. A man is truly in earnest, and sets himself without reserve to do God's will as he finds it in His Word. What is the first experience that such a man will gain? what his earliest lesson, his first upward step Godward, although it be apparently a step downward into the dark? I say that it is a knowledge of failure and of sin. He cannot keep God's will in its inward spirit and power through the weakness of his flesh. Wandering thoughts, cold devotions, affections that tend earthward, self-will that lurks in a thousand varied garbs, inconsistencies of the thoughts, the temper and the life, duties actually omitted and sins committed, — are not these what a man finds who resolutely endeavours in his own strength to do God's will, and who deals honestly with himself and God?

Must he not ask himself why he fails? I wish to do right, and why, then, this wrong? why this overmastering power of evil in me? why these broken resolutions, these abortive intentions, these words and promises as profitless as "clouds without water, and trees thrice dead?" Ah, why, indeed, but from indwelling sin! Thus there flashes upon the soul a sense of sin and a consciousness of

guilt before God. And when the soul once stands face to face with this truth, the impossibility of self-righteousness and of doing God's will as he fondly thought in his own strength must become clear as the flash of the sunshine. "Then I am a helpless sinner," he exclaims, "vile and worthless, and where shall I find help and hope? If I cannot save myself, who can save me?" And then there breaks upon his soul, amid his streaming tears, and his struggling supplication to God in this agony of his conscience, the sight of Christ upon the cross, and there thrills into his ears the gracious words, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgression, and as a cloud thy sin. Return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee." He flings the arms of his faith around the feet of the dying Jesus, and cries out, "My Lord and my God, my Saviour, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, all in all, whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. To whom else shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and there is none other name under heaven whereby I can be saved.

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head.
When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
Then this shall be my only plea,
Jesus hath lived and died for me."

Thus I believe that many and many a soul is led to Christ, or brought nearer to Him in a contact of heart with heart unknown before. The ignorant effort to do God's will in our own strength, the bitter failure, the consciousness of sin, the sight of Christ, and rest in Him, all come step by step. I am sure that there are none whom the Spirit begins to teach who are not led on to this lesson, and do not enter at last into this peace. Our Lord is so far from teaching that our doing the will of God is the meritorious ground of salvation, that the honest effort to do it shows the groundlessness of all hope that does not rest on Christ. I have said that God's modes of teaching are very various, deep as His wisdom, rich as His love. He alone knows in what way He has taught, is teaching, us, but the lesson is the same, and let us ask if we have learned it. The warning words are sure as the deep foundations of the earth, firm as the everlasting hills, changeless as the skies, nay, immutable as God. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

XIX.

LIBERTY OF HEART.

"I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart."—PSALM cxix. 32.

THE general subject of the whole of this psalm is the Word of God. The depth of adoring delight which the writer felt in it, and the implicit submission of his mind and will to its instruction, will be apparent to every one who either hears or reads it with the slightest attention. These sentiments are rendered much more remarkable, not less so, and much more full of instruction to ourselves, not less so, when we remember that it must have been to the first five Books of the Bible alone that the Psalmist can have referred. If such was the feeling of an ancient saint towards these five Books, how much greater should be our admiration and love for the whole completed Bible which we possess, with its full record of our own everlasting life and peace through the saving work of the Son of God! If, by the aid of the Spirit, the Word of God by Moses was so full of comfort, how much more comfort should we find in the Word of God by His Son Jesus Christ!

There are two things especially remarkable in this psalm—the variety of expressions used to describe the Word of God and the corresponding variety of expressions used to describe the sin of man. Thus the Word of God is called His *testimonies*, because by it alone we know God Himself and His character, and are assured of His loving purposes towards our fallen race. It is called His *law*, because by Christ we become citizens of the heavenly city, the Jerusalem above, whose builder and maker is God, members of the family of God; and the Word contains the code by which He governs it. It is called His *commandments*, because God is King and Judge, and the creatures whom He has made are bound by every tie of interest and duty to obey His will. It is called His *statutes*, because it contains not only the will of God in general, but specific and exact directions by which we must be ruled, as absolutely as an Englishman must be ruled by the laws standing on the statute book of his country. It is called God's *precepts*, because it contains the advice and counsel of a heavenly Father for the conduct of His earthly children. And, lastly, it is called, His *judgments*, because it contains the rules whereby He will judge the world at the great day, and apportion the recompenses of heaven and hell "according to the things done in the body."

Thus rich and blessed from every point of view is the Word of God, like the sun in the heavens, which not only gives light, but which warms and quickens

all nature, orders its times and seasons, and paints with their thousand hues of beauty both the heavens above and the earth beneath.

Not less remarkable is the variety of language in which the psalm describes human sin. These descriptions are found in its supplications. The Psalmist prays that God would take away out of his heart whatever hindered his loving and serving Him. Thus he considers the state of a sinner to be a state of spiritual death, and over and over again prays that God would give his soul life: "Quicken me, O Lord." He considers sin to be a state of ignorance, and prays for teaching: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." He considers sin to be a state of wandering in dark and crooked ways, and asks for guidance: "O that my ways were made so direct that I might keep Thy statutes." He considers sin as a state of weakness, in which he was unable to do what he himself thought to be right: "Strengthen Thou me according to Thy Word." He considers it as a state of danger from strong enemies, and appeals for protection: "I am Thine, O save me;" as the state of a stumbling man: "Uphold me that I may live;" as the condition of a lost sheep: "I have gone astray, O seek Thy servant;"—and, perhaps not least striking of all, as a state of captivity and confinement, as in the text: "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart."

I.—The words express a consciousness of actual captivity. There is a stress laid on the words "Thy commandments." The Psalmist recognised their goodness and excellence, and desired to follow them. But he was at the same time conscious of an opposing force, of a constraint exercised on him from which he was unable to get free, and which not only prevented his going in the way of God's commandments, but compelled him to go in another way, and perhaps a totally contrary one. The feeling may be illustrated by the case of a messenger in time of war charged by a great king with an important commission, who on his way is seized by the king's enemies, disarmed, stripped, bound, and led away in an opposite direction; longing to be free that he may do his master's will, fretting under his captivity, and appealing to his lord very much as the Psalmist cries to God in this place, "Help me, and set me free, that I may do Thy will and accomplish thine orders." It is just in this way that the Psalmist appears to have felt.

There is hope in such a state. There is a measure of grace in recognising that God's law is good, and religion a right and blessed and happy thing. So long as men are contented in a life of sin, there can be no chance for them. If they have sunk so low, that they wish for nothing but to eat and drink and sleep and die,—and there are such men, at all events men who say that they are contented thus, whatever secret thoughts may yet work within,—I

say that with such men we have no ground of appeal. It is as if they had lost their immortality, and as if the innate greatness of human nature had died away within them and perished, leaving them no better than the dog that dies, for aught we know, never to live again. I wonder that such men are not ashamed to live; and yet, strange to say, these are the very men who rely most on their own strength and wisdom, and reject with the deepest disdain the Word of God. They labour all their lives to do what? why, to take away from themselves all that can make human nature great and noble. For such men, in such a state, there can be no hope.

But there is hope for those who see God and God's Word to be good, and wish, however faintly, that they could walk by it. I have heard a man say that he would give all he had in the world to have a Christian hope. I have asked such a person whether he did not think it good to be a saved man, and he has answered me with a cordial "yes;" yet a "yes" that mingled with a sigh of helplessness, as if such a hope were beyond his possible attainment. Many and many a drunkard, many and many a profligate, see the evil of sin, and are like the Hebrews of ancient times when the meat they had coveted stank in their mouths. They inwardly long for deliverance from the evil which they do. There is hope for such men, for they must learn to regard that which holds them back as a bondage, and that which binds them as an enemy. When a soul once begins to

sigh for freedom, it will not probably be very long before it is free; for that very sigh is itself the beginning of spiritual liberty.

So the Psalmist cried out in his chains. He was a captive; not that his body was captive, but, what was far worse, his heart,—"Enlarge my heart." A man who wishes that he could do God's will has taken the first step towards life. The conscience has got free and stretches out its suppliant hands for help; the affections are, however, still in bondage, and the tyrant power of long-formed habits of sin holds the soul even while it turns its longing eyes to the sweet paths of righteousness, from which, a slave to his own iniquity, it is being borne away. It is a dreadful state in which to live; and it is no wonder that, under the unhappiness caused by it, the man should try to forget his misery, or else cry out for help. It may be the captivity of some special sin, which holds us back from peace. That sin may be an outward vice,—drunkenness, profligacy, covetousness, dishonesty; but it need not be. It may be an inward temper of the mind,—pride, vanity, or the love of the world, or the love of pleasure, or the love of admiration, or it may be the simple repugnance of an unconverted nature to God —the dull passive opposition that will not see, nor hear, nor feel. Let such a struggling soul learn that its condition is not hopeless. Freedom by your own strength is impossible. The prisoner in yonder dungeon may madly tear at his chains, or furiously beat his poor flesh against the solid walls that hold

him in, but he is not more powerless to snap the strong iron, or wrench open the ponderous stones, than is a poor sinner to break his own bondage. But there is One who can help, One only, One able to help so effectually, that the chained limbs in their delighted freedom shall actually run. That One is God. Only breathe in sincerity the Psalmist's prayer, and you will soon find that He is neither slow to hear nor powerless to answer. The promise will be found to be no vain boast,—"I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart;" or, as it is in the Prayer-book version, "when Thou hast set my heart at liberty."

II.—The words express the consciousness of confinement, and of narrowness of affection and desire after God. Thus considered, they belong to a higher religious state than I have just described. Here the stress of the text is on the word "*run*." To run implies a high state of vigour and activity,—not the tottering motion of the infant, nor the slow creeping step of age, not even the solid steady tramp of declining manhood, but the buoyancy and lightness and spring of youth—eager, happy, and unwearying activity. When applied to a man's soul, it means a high state of grace, like that of the apostle when, forgetting the things that were behind, he pressed "towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

The man who breathes a prayer for this full

measure of spiritual life has escaped from the actual captivity of sin. He has flung away the works of darkness beneath the cross of his Saviour, has put on the armour of light, and started on the heavenly race, like John Bunyan's pilgrim, on and up to the heavenly Jerusalem. But he is conscious of his need of more help. It may be that the first glow and warmth of his conversion to God pass away; or, in the mere advancement of his love for Christ, he begins to be conscious how poor is his service, how weak is his faith, how timid his hope, and how cold his love. He is enabled to walk in God's commandments; but he longs to *run* in them, with a full joy he has not hitherto attained. He is free; but he feels his heart to be confined, and his desires after God to be small and narrow compared to what they should be, and he prays for their enlargement.

A very common-place illustration may perhaps help us. The human heart is like some of those elastic substances known to modern commerce, which are able to close over a very small thing, and contract themselves to the diminutive dimensions of its littleness; or, on the other side, are able to stretch to a large object, and become great as that which they contain. Such substances must contain some object within them, or else they utterly collapse, and become as if they had no capacity for anything. Just such is the human heart. It must contain something, or it withers away, just as the human conscience withers away and loses all feeling when

hardened by a life of carelessness and sin. The human heart must contain something; for if there be nothing else to occupy it, the very necessities of its outward life draw it towards material things. It never can be quite empty. If there be nothing else, the mere force of its own natural corruption draws it towards that which is corrupt—the passions and gratifications of the dying flesh. The heart must hold something, but it will be itself just what that something is. If the objects of affection be small and mean, the heart will be small and mean: if they be great and heavenly, the heart will become great and heavenly, like that which it contains. Such an illustration may fairly represent the actual truth.

Now the Psalmist was conscious that his heart was narrow. He craved for more freedom of faith; for larger desires after God; for fuller trust in Him, and for warmer and stronger love towards Him. He felt his soul contracted, as if something on the outside bound it round about, and prevented it from opening. There are few Christians who will not have the same feeling, and will not be conscious how small and low is their state of grace; how poor their service to their God, compared to what it should be, and what it might be with God to help them.

Nor will it be difficult to trace, in some degree, the causes of this narrowness. With a man it may be a too engrossing occupation in earthly business, too predominant and absorbing a care for earthly success, limiting the times of prayer and interrupt-

ing that free and full communion with God without which no growth in holiness is possible. With a woman it may be the troubling about "many things," such as kept Martha of old from the feet of Jesus: the absorption of thoughts in her children, her household, and her daily cares. It may be the love of money, or it may be even its opposite, the love of spending; an ambition to make a gay show, an over-conformity to the luxurious habits of a civilisation that often hides under a Christian name un-Christian tempers and affections. It may be fear of the opinion of one's friends and neighbours; for the number of men and women who are laughed and ridiculed out of their religious earnestness is large enough to cause triumph in hell and tears in heaven. It may be any of these, or other such like things, and till the bonds are broken, the narrow and confined desires cannot hold full joy and peace.

Here, again, our hope is in God. He can enlarge our hearts by more perfectly revealing His own blessed self within them. He enters into the soul, and the soul grows with His presence. His glory, and greatness, and beauty snap the restraining bands, and stretch the heart in which He dwells till it becomes capable of peace and joy unknown before. Then, set free indeed from all ruling motive save the love and fear of God, with what sweet delight does not the saint run to do His will, and accomplish in blessed reality the aspiration of the text, "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart!"

XX.

HUMILITY AND ITS GREATNESS.

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."—1 PETER v. 5, 6.

THERE is, perhaps, no grace so distinctively Christian—none, that is, which belongs so entirely to the Gospel in contrast with human systems—as humility. Under heathen teaching, which centred everything in man, it was a vice, not a virtue. In Christian teaching, which centres everything in God, it is one of the most excellent and conspicuous of graces; there is no other so utterly opposed to the natural disposition, and which bears, therefore, so conspicuously the stamp and workmanship of the Spirit of God. In proportion, however, as the Christian preacher enlarges upon the dignity and glory of humility, it is the more necessary that its nature should be clearly understood, and especially that it should be distinguished from that bashful and timid temper which constitutes the natural disposition of many persons. This may arise from weakness of body, from constitutional delicacy of the nervous

system, from the absence of the stronger and more masculine virtues of courage, fortitude, and energy.

It is a great mistake to conceive of humility as if it were something mean and servile, and sprung from the mere consciousness of weakness. Humility is not a disposition of nature, but a principle of grace, the common feature of all the true children of God. It has nothing akin to cowardice, but is rather the attribute of the noblest and loftiest courage. It is notorious as a matter of familiar earthly experience that, in moments of peculiar danger and difficulty, it is not the blustering braggart who becomes the hero of the moment, and whose stedfast courage faces the storm without blanching; but the quiet, unassuming modest man, who makes no parade of his manliness, because he does not need to do so, and because his own true self-respect forbids his offending the self-respect of others. The type of human vanity may be the boisterous brawling brook; but the type of Christian humility is the calm river, too deep and strong to be noisy.

The proverbial experience of mankind proves this to be true. Experience also proves that humility is the attribute of strength, not weakness; the child of power and knowledge, not of feebleness and ignorance. It implies an inward fund of moral strength, a self-acquaintance, and an even balance of the mind which stands too firmly on its feet to be easily upset. I am anxious to remove this preliminary misconception, that the true dignity of the

grace, not as something below the ordinary level of human nature, but as something far above it, may be fairly understood. It is to no coward timidity, to no cringing meanness, to no abnegation of the true dignity and loftiness of human nature that the apostle calls us in this place; but to one of the noblest and sublimest of graces. It is of the true stamp of the Spirit's work the apostle speaks: "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

From the many thoughts suggested by the words, I select two, to which I ask attention.

I.—Let us examine the source and ground of humility. This is drawn from the knowledge of God, and from the relation in which we stand to Him. Hence, where the knowledge of God is absent, the exercise of humility becomes impossible. It will be observed that, in the words of the text, humility towards man and humility towards God are blended, some may think, at first sight, confused. But to think this would be a great mistake, and a deep dishonour to the inspiration of the Spirit of God. The immediate exercise of the grace is towards man. "All of you be subject one to another;" yet the spring of it is to be found before the throne of God, and in the out-going of the river of life: "Humble

yourselves under the mighty hand of God." It is in His presence, and before the light and glory of His majesty, that the lesson is to be learned; not in the rude conflicts of the world, nor in the eager strifes of man with man; not in the heat of human passion, interest, or ambition; but in worship and devotion, the uplifting of the heart Godward, and the flashing of the light of God into the darkened human intellect. Humility begins with the knowledge of God, and advances to the knowledge of ourselves. Thus we see at our first step that it consists of something we gain, not of aught we lose. The humble man is rich in his humility, for he has gained that which the proud man has not. Pride is the instinct of ignorance; humility, the expression of a true and Divine knowledge.

But we must take another step, and ask how it is that the knowledge of God, instead of puffing a man up with the conceit of an acquisition, only produces humility and the most prostrate lowliness of mind. It might be answered,—because the knowledge itself is but a gift freely bestowed; it is a revelation, not a discovery, and therefore implies in itself the obligation of a receiver towards a donor. This is true; but a more complete reply is,—that humility is produced by the impressiveness of the majesty and greatness of the Divine Being, as revealed to us in His matchless perfections and infinite glory. This knowledge of the glory of God is not a work of nature, but a gift of grace. A head belief in the existence of a Deity

and of His qualities may exist, but it may be so dim and vague and general as to exercise no influence whatever, and to awaken no single emotion of love, or praise, or admiration. Knowledge of God only becomes a real and influential thing when the Holy Spirit brings it, as it were, out of the clouds, and presents it to us in definite form and shape in the person of Christ Jesus. Then it becomes a thing of experience and power, for we are brought near to God in the Beloved, and, with a deep sense of sin, cling to His promises and prove them to be true and trustworthy. This knowledge is then like the removal of a veil, like the opening of the skies, like the gift of a new sense whereby the soul sees God, sees Him in His holiness, and saving might, and boundless grace. Then the Psalmist's words come true: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

This new knowledge becomes a test, whereby we measure ourselves. We cannot help this self-application, since, in knowing God, we have gained a new idea altogether. And it is in the immense difference between what God is and what we are, that Christian humility originates and grows. We humble ourselves under the mightiness of God. The distance between God and us appears too vast even for comparison, if it were not filled up with other objects. Christ comes between us and the Infinite. The Divine glory is tempered with the human sympathies and experience, and by the actual form and features

of the man Christ Jesus. It is no longer the difference between us and an abstract, invisible, and immeasurable God which affects the soul, but the difference between us and human nature as it was, and is, in our blessed Master—with human wants, affections, duties, and sympathies, yet so wonderful in His holiness, so blessed in His character, that for two thousand years the world, believing and unbelieving, has worshipped before the perfect Man. And as we look at Jesus do we not become conscious of a dignity in ourselves, and of possibilities of holiness in our own nature to which we were insensible before the contemplation of Jesus—so tenderly human, yet so gloriously Divine—called them into life?

Then, when we read the inspired history of man, lowliness is increased. For there we are told, not alone of the immortal spirit breathed into man, by virtue of whose undying life our hopes pass through the grave and gate of death into the other world, but of the Divine likeness in which we were first created, even in the image and similitude of God. And now, standing amid these wonders of revelation, with the wretched experience of ourselves, as we are, fresh and full upon us, there is not a truth which does not deepen our awe by the very wonderfulness of the realities to which we find ourselves related, and with which we stand in daily contact. Whether it be the majesty and glory of God Himself; whether it be the tale of Creation, and the beauty of primeval

man; whether it be the dark story of the Fall; whether it be the marvellous story of the Cross; whether it be the grand future which still remains for us in judgment and the world to come; whether it be the oppressive mystery of that word "eternity," or the glory of the Messiah's future kingdom; on whichever side we look, there is not a truth which does not lower the soul into the dust with a wondering sense at once of the dignity of man and of his littleness and sinfulness.

For here is the wonder, that true humility grows out of self-respect. No man living has so high a conception of the dignity of human nature as the Christian. Human nature is a mean thing to the unconverted man; to the converted man it is (may I say?) a fragment of Divinity. Yet this self-respect does not inflate him with pride; the soul's hopes are too great, too vast, too infinite, for so petty a feeling as pride; true self-respect induces deep, calm, trusting humility. Thus we learn the lesson, and thus alone. If we are all of us subject one to another, and clothed with humility, it can only be because we have learned our lesson beneath the cross, and have humbled ourselves "under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time."

II.—From the source and nature of Christian humility let us pass on to consider its practical outgoing. Here, again, we must take the side turned towards God first; otherwise we shall be

out of order. What are the characteristic feelings, and what the corresponding acts, which a profound humility produces in our intercourse with God? In the first place, it produces an absorbing and unmeasured admiration. In speaking of so great a being as God, adoration may, perhaps, be the better word, so long as it is understood to be the adoration, not of fear, but of love—the adoration of desire, of grateful affection, and of fervent praise. Humility of mind not only grows out of this feeling, but in turn reacts on it, and deepens and enlarges the sentiment out of which it springs. For, the worse we think of ourselves, the more adoring must be our sense of the sovereign love and grace, the infinitely perfect and effectual righteousness of the God who has redeemed us. The greatness of God first abases pride, and then the knowledge of ourselves magnifies the greatness of God. "What is man, that Thou hast such respect unto him? or the son of man, that Thou so regardest him? Man is like a thing of nought." And, then, out of adoring praise to the redeeming God by whom we live, arises simple trusting faith in Him. It is evident that the more conscious we are of our own exceeding weakness, and of the abyss which still separates what we are from what we ought to be, the more we shall rely on the grace which alone is sufficient either for the blotting out of the guilt of sin or for the breaking down of its power.

From praise and trust combined there will arise

also implicit obedience. For admiration and trust exalt to the highest degree the glory of the Being admired and trusted. Then, how can God be wrong in any way? and if right, then every word of His must be kept as a seal of our acceptance. If obedience be hard, trust in God makes it easy, for trust goes out and up in prayer; and prayer, rising like a messenger, comes down again like an angel from the Divine presence laden with blessing and bearing the gifts of grace and peace.

And now we shall see how these three sentiments of adoration, trust, and obedience necessarily affect our relation towards our fellow-men. Let it be noted that these graces are full of sweetness and delight. They imply, indeed, inferiority, dependence, submission; but the emotions they awaken in the heart are joyous to the highest degree. If they enter into our intercourse with God, and if that intercourse (as it must be in one who loves God, and who at every time and in everything has his heart above) be habitual, they grow into a permanent character and frame of mind. They are not simply emotions experienced in the act of prayer, but they form a part of ourselves, and are, therefore, carried by us out of the closet and out of the church into our human life. All our familiar experience becomes a constant hymn of praise, like the songs of the blessed, who rest not day nor night. The habit can, therefore, no more be thrown off than we can throw off ourselves—no more cease to act than a living man can cease to move.

Now, place that man whose habitual affections are with God, and whose habitual character is pervaded with adoration, trust, and obedience, into the circle of his fellow-men, and see how he will act—act, not because he is weak, but because he is strong, and has a secret depth of Divine life and a secret height of Divine hope within him, of which the world has no experience.

Such a man will be the human copy and reflection of God. It is true, indeed, that, properly speaking, there can be no humility in God, because the all-perfect Being can never be other than conscious of His own all-perfection. But neither, on the other hand, can there be condescension in man, for he is but a man, though he be the mightiest monarch on earth, and has no natural superiority from which to condescend. But there is condescension in God, and that quality of God, planted by the Spirit in man, becomes humility. That humility acts in an unfailing and natural courtesy towards all men. Truly respecting his own immortal nature and his calling in Christ, he therefore respects others who are as immortal as himself, and may be heirs of the same calling. Gentle manners, gentle looks, gentle words ever considerate of other men's feelings, make the true Christian a natural gentleman, and invest him with an intuitive politeness which is but the outgoing of the Divine life within.

As such a man is sincere and pure-hearted, so his courtesy is but the unspoken language of the love

which seeks to do every man good. This love leads us to be subject one to another; not to stand stiffly on rights, still less to be puffed up with pride; for what have we to do with pride, who are but as the worms of the earth in the presence of God? We must, therefore, ever be disposed to give way, to please others rather than ourselves, and in the deep consciousness we have of the vast difference between what we are and what we ought to be, to esteem others better than ourselves; for we know our own sins and weaknesses better than we can possibly know theirs—at least, we ought to do so—and should be abased in the dust by what we know.

Let us picture to ourselves a man who is thus humbled, and say if he is not a strong man, and noble and honourable in his strength. Does not his humility invest him like a girdle of honour and a crown of glory? Is he not clothed with it, as with a raiment of righteousness and a garment of salvation? The strength is all of God; the gift is of God; the knowledge is of God; the character in its appropriate relations is the character of God. There is a world of moral strength in it, a height of religious attainment, which can be reached only by faith and prayer. Greatest is he in the kingdom of God who most largely practises the lesson of the apostle: "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

XXI.

COMPANIONSHIP WITH GOD.

"These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God."—GENESIS vi. 9.

THESE words throw a ray of light on what is otherwise a picture of almost unbroken darkness. No stronger proof of the degraded condition of human nature can be conceived, than that it should have repented God that He had made man, and that He should have found it necessary to destroy, beneath the waters of the deluge, the race that He had made. It is not without a purpose, however, that this period was permitted to exist, or that it has been recorded in the Word of God. The sin of our first parents had brought death into the world; the immediate death of the soul, in that it became at once separated from God; and the mortality of the body,—its liability to pain, sickness, and dissolution. Man lost holiness and happiness within himself, and became subject to suffering and sorrow without. It was in the mind of God, even from the first, to save him from this ruin, and the promise of a Redeemer was accordingly given even before the expulsion from Paradise had been accomplished. This salvation was to begin in the heart of man himself, and to be

accomplished by his believing acceptance of the promised Redeemer of the world. But it was not likely, just as it is not likely now, that men would seek to be saved by another, unless first convinced that they could not save themselves; unless, that is, they were convinced that their nature had become too deeply and radically corrupt to be able to do anything towards their own recovery. This could only be shown by the actual trial.

Accordingly God allotted the period before the deluge to the making of this experiment. He left man to himself, not, indeed, without the knowledge of God's will, for this had been handed down from Adam; nor without a preacher of righteousness, for such was Enoch, and such was Noah; but, with these to help him, God left man to himself to try whether, by his own strength, he was able to resist sin and to recover the state of holiness and happiness lost at the fall. For two thousand years the opportunity was given to the human race to reinstate themselves in their lost position and condition. Divine forbearance waited and was patient; but all was in vain; the fatal result is briefly recorded in the pages of the Bible.

Does any man dream that he can save himself, and raise himself up to God and heaven, by a righteousness of his own? Let him look at this history, and fling away for ever the vain imagination. The result proved, that the force of a corrupted nature and the temptations of the devil were too strong for men then, as they are too strong for men now. Instead

of rising back towards God, men fell away from Him more and more. It was seen only too plainly that the ruin of man was utter, and that there was not a solitary part of human nature that sin had not spoiled. Like some fair land, once blooming and beautiful, reduced into universal silence and desolation—"every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The evil, moreover, became as widely extended as it was deeply seated. Wickedness spread everywhere with such utter lawlessness that the earth was "filled with violence." The tide of evil, like the tide of the avenging deluge, rose gradually till it submerged the world. For a while a chosen seed, "the sons of God," strove against it, but the history records how they too were swept away with the temptation. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all that they chose." The result was a race who were giants in wickedness, till the very earth, stained with their sin, was "corrupt before God." The spectacle must have been a dreadful one, though to us the spiritual horror of it has been lost in the more material and visible horror of the deluge that followed. To the angels the horror must have been in the sin, not in the deserved punishment that followed it, most terrible as it was. Such is the picture presented to us. But amid its dark shadows there was this one bright spot of light: "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God."

If we endeavour to keep the familiar figure of walking with a person fully in mind, we shall see that the phrase implies,—

I.—Companionship,—constant and habitual; for as God is everywhere present and at all times, so the saint is never parted from Him. United once we are united for ever, by a companionship as constant as the omnipresence of God, and as long continued as the immortal life of man's soul. Let the expression be closely observed, together with the familiar ideas its uggests—*walking with God.* Not amid God's works, nor in God's presence; not with the saints of God, not in the ways of God, but actually *with God*, as if the Divine Being Himself had quitted His throne—as, indeed, He has done in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God — and, linking Himself with the creature He had redeemed, went forth in sweet and wonderful companionship with man, inseparable throughout all the trials and perplexing paths of human experience. Thus it is recorded in the brief history of man before he fell, that the "Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day." And the two passages mean so far the same thing, that they express the actual fact of the personal God, complete in all His power and glory—God Himself—entering into actual and abiding companionship with His human creatures. The words may be a figure, drawn from the habit which dear friends often form

of walking together; but the fact expressed is true and actual. The very God, the Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, Judge of all;—the very God holds wondrous companionship with man. How must heaven look on in admiring astonishment at the depth of God's love, and hell tremble at His delivering and protecting power, when God and man walk together! But the expression is more exact than this. It is not that God walked with Noah, but that Noah walked with God. It is not, therefore, the mere fact of God's guardian presence that is stated, but it is Noah's consciousness of that presence. His vivid faith realised God, as if the soul's inward eye saw the invisible, till His presence became as real as when the eye sees, and when the hand touches, some human companion of our walk. It is here that the force of the lesson lies. We must all be painfully conscious of the weakness of our own faith. There are thousands of unconverted men to whom God is as far distant, and who think as little of Him, as if there were no God at all. Even to those who have found peace with God through the blood of the covenant, and who have been taught by the Spirit really to love Him, how faint and dim is the sight of God! He is to many of us rather a great name than a living Being; rather an idea and conception of the mind than a personal companion; rather unreal in the infiniteness of His nature than close and near in His ruling providence, quickening grace, and comforting love — so close

and near that He is not only around us, but within us.

The question naturally occurs, how that sight of God which is so weak to us should have been so intense to Noah. He had just the same human nature as ourselves, and was beset with the same infirmities. He had no more means of seeing God with the bodily eye, nor of touching Him with the bodily hand, than had the wicked generation among whom he lived, or than we possess. Yet his soul saw God; and the means which kept the sight of Him clear and constant are all open to ourselves,—much prayer, the diligent study of what He has revealed, devout meditation on His promises and on Himself; habitual worship, constant reference to Him and to His help in all the details of familiar life, and the teaching of the Holy Spirit to make Him known to us. And, oh, with what a lofty courage and a bright hope should not this constant sight of God fill us! How fearless should they be of sin, the world, and the devil; how strong, and bold, and patient, of whom it is written in heaven, as it was written of the patriarch of old times, "Noah walked with God."

II.—The expression implies concurrence of will. To walk together implies movement toward the same object, along the same road. Where two persons take different roads, companionship must cease. Thus the Divine Book puts it, "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" There

must be the same will in companions. Yet we know that Noah was a fallen creature like ourselves. He lived after the curse of sin had fallen upon man; and we know it to be the essence of sin that man's will and God's will do not agree. In unfallen man, pure and holy as he came from his Creator's hand, there was perfect agreement with God. The two wills, the Divine and the human, were like two strains of music in sweet harmony with each other. But sin turned the harmony into discord. It is the very essence of the carnal nature that, in St. Paul's language, "it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The will of man has become contrary to the will of God. Is there one who is not conscious of this in himself? How, then, shall they be harmonised that the two may walk together?

One of the two must be subject to the other. That is most certain. Which is it to be? Is the will of the great, omnipotent, and holy Creator to be brought into conformity with all the wayward fancies, all the petty selfishnesses, and all the foolish imaginations of fallen man? God forbid! God forgive the statement of such a supposition! Happily, the thing is impossible; for, only fancy the will of God brought down to the ten thousand times ten thousand varying wills, that is, varying wishes, of men! In what awful confusion and inextricable perplexity would not all the order of the world be involved, if every man had his own way! No, this cannot be. Let not any individual dream that

it can be in his or her individual case. It cannot be. God's will can not be changed to suit man's. Then it remains that man's will must be changed to suit God's, and thus all the varying wishes of mankind be harmonised in one adoring submission to the Divine mind. This can be; this may be; if you will not drive the Holy Spirit away from you, this will be. For the Spirit of God can work the great change, which alone can enable you to lay your own selfish will on one side and, looking up to heaven, exclaim, "Our Father, which art in heaven, Thy will be done."

See, how important is this change to the whole order of your life and the course of your daily thoughts. The phrase "walking together" implies that God's will is an active will, and enters into the whole course of our lives. Without a conformity of our will to His we must be constantly fighting against Him, be constantly in opposition; and as He is strongest, who must suffer in the conflict but ourselves? Thus, for instance, our outward position and lot in life, our station, and circumstances, and condition, are ordered by Him, not indeed so rigidly but that His Providence may open the way for a rise in life and a change of condition; but, still, it is His will whether we stay where we were born, or move up into a higher sphere. Thus also the events of life for good or evil, its sicknesses, afflictions, separations, are ordered by Him, and it is no small triumph of grace to be content with them. Ay,

and there is more, for this submission of will in temporal things never can be learned save by conformity of will in spiritual things. The great purpose of God's revealed will is to save souls; and till our souls are saved, safe in the arms of Jesus both for time and for eternity, His will cannot have become ours: His will is not done. It is the experience of His great love to us, and of its constraining sweetness; it is the assurance that we have found pardon and peace with Him through the blood of the Lamb; it is the possession of the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to look up, as loving children look up to a loving parent, and cry, "Abba, Father;" it is the confidence that we are His and He is ours, and that He will never leave nor forsake His people, which enables us to leave all our anxieties with Him, and to make His will our will. The struggle may be great and sore, as with the human will of our Master in His agony of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but Thine be done;" but, when we can say this, we can "walk with God."

III.—The expression implies affectionate and delightful intercourse. Do you not choose as a companion one whom you love? and if your choice be well placed, and there be thorough sympathy between you and your friend, is not companionship delightful? Indeed, do you not walk with him, for the sake of being alone with the loved one and enjoying his society? God is infinite and omnipresent,

and can walk at the same time with all the countless company of the redeemed saints, and yet be with each one as really, as completely, in every glorious attribute, as if He and that one individual were alone together. And what must be the unutterable delights of such companionship, when perfect love casteth out fear!

But is not all this tall talk? some may say. Is there any reality in it, or is it an unmeaning declamation or wild fanaticism? No; it is real and true, however high it may soar above the ordinary thoughts of man and the things that are seen. Do we not speak to God in prayer and praise, and does He not hear? Does He fail to catch even one cry of an infant's prayer, or one song of an infant's praise? And when we read the Bible, what is it but the voice of God to us? What is it when His Spirit brings some special text home to our hearts with a new power, or fills us with inward peace and joy strangely sweet and unearthly; or when His Providence dissipates threatening clouds and scatters an impending storm;—what is it, I say, but God answering us? Oh, doubt it not that there is wonderful peace in intercourse with God. I know not how the sufferings of the flesh and the anxieties of life would be endurable without it. The intense sense of a near and present God, the holy conformity to His will, and the happy enjoyment of His love,—surely they are all included in the vivid and graphic phrase, "walking with God."

XXII.

THE INFLUENCE OF GREAT TRUTHS ON LITTLE THINGS.

"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."—ROMANS xii. 11, 12.

THESE words constitute an incomplete quotation, and I use them only as representing the entire passage of which they form an organic part. The whole extends from the third verse onwards to the close of the chapter, and contains in all twenty-six clauses, expressive negatively or positively of twenty-three graces of the Christian character. It is a long string of most precious gems, and it is my purpose to regard them as a whole, and to notice some characteristics by which they are distinguished.

I invite attention, in the first place, to the relation in which they all stand to the life and hope of the Christian. The connecting word with which the chapter opens, "therefore"—"I beseech you therefore,"—looks both backwards to the chapters preceding, and forwards to the verses that follow. In the look backwards we find the grand Christian motive. It pervades the whole argument of the Epistle, in which the apostle unfolds, with inspired fulness and

precision, the method of a sinner's salvation through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This occupies the first eight chapters. Step by step the apostle asserts the universal corruption and total guilt of human nature; its absolute impotence to save itself, and the completeness of the redeeming work of Christ from the first dawn of faith in the soul to the full burst of light in the glory of the future world. It is, in truth, the Divine history of a saint from his conversion to his glorification. Then three chapters are devoted to tracing the marvellous dealings of God, no longer with one soul, but with all souls together, both Jew and Gentile, till, in the contemplation of the deep counsels of God, the apostle breaks out into an irrepressible ecstasy of emotion,—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Then comes the "therefore" of this twelfth chapter, expressing the motive which arises from all this grace and love.

The very order is remarkable. The life of holiness is to be lived, not that we may be saved, but because we are saved. Wonder, adoration, gratitude, praise, love, all combine to teach that, as the Son of God gave Himself for us, so we should give ourselves back to Him, and that with a dedication so complete that the very body, the fleshly tabernacle of the redeemed soul, is to become a sacrifice "holy and acceptable to God."

Having laid down this obligation, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," the

apostle next expresses, in the second verse, the grand principle of all holiness. It can only have its spring in a total change of heart and life, wrought in us by the mighty Spirit of God—in the gift of a new nature with its own spiritual senses and experiences. "Be not conformed to this world." But how can this be avoided by the heirs of Adam's ruin in a state where, for thousands of years, "sin hath reigned unto death?" The answer is decisive, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." And then, in the remainder of the chapter, he traces this great change into its details. It is as if we watched the beginning of some great river rising, like the springs of the Jordan, where the strong clear waters rush upwards in their strength, and then followed them as they flowed into a hundred divergent streams, carrying beauty and abundance through the smiling land, till they meet again to flow into the ocean. The fountain has its source in the absorbing love of a saved soul. It is strong and sweet with the joy of the Holy Ghost. Thence it flows into the varied channels of human life and action, and fills them with sanctity and praise. With what rich abundance the apostle heaps grace upon grace: "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

I.—We may learn from these words the influence

of great truths on the details of Christian practice. The truths, explained in the previous part of the Epistle, are almost the grandest that can possibly occupy human thought. I say almost the grandest, because the highest of all possible themes is God Himself in the essential qualities of His Godhead. Here it is God; but God in His relation to the salvation of the world and the arrangements He has made in dealing with us. Not only, as I have already said, does the apostle explain in detail the method of salvation, but in doing so he takes in the full breadth of the Divine action. Thus in the first two chapters he includes both Jew and Gentile in his range of vision. In the fifth chapter he presents the whole world as in antagonism to God—an empire in which "sin hath reigned unto death," and points out the two great representatives of man: the first Adam, in whom he fell, and the second Adam, in whom he has been redeemed. In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters he surveys the whole plan of God, and the order of those dealings with Jew and Gentile which will only reach their accomplishment when Jew and Gentile together are finally gathered into the same glory. Such glimpses of the breadth and extent of the plans of God are of the sublimest kind, and afford views of the greatness of God Himself in which the mind is lost in adoration. Our personal interest gives tenderness to truths which would otherwise oppress us. The mighty act of the incarnation of the Son of God, the completion of His atoning death,

the sinner's free justification through His righteousness, the saint's triumph over the united temptations of earth and hell, and his final glory as a son and heir of God, are but the blood-sprinkled threshold over which we cross into the yet more stupendous view of God Himself, and of the unsearchable wisdom and goodness which can fill a fallen world with hope and eternity with praise.

Such are the topics of the Epistle, the thoughts which go into the fulness and force of the motive to which the apostle appeals; and the motive should be strong in us as the truths on which it feeds are wonderful.

But I think we must be conscious of a danger arising from the very greatness of these truths. The distance between them and the little, petty, and apparently trivial details of daily life and conduct is so immense that we fail to bring the greatness of the one into contact with the littleness of the other. We almost fancy that we are degrading such grand thoughts, by mixing them up with questions of daily disposition, daily temper, and what appear to us the trivialities which really make up the sum of human life. Thus we are tempted to place the great truths of religion on one side and the details of our life on the other, and to keep them separate. We get as far as the second verse of the chapter; but there we stop. We admit that a Christian, the object of such a love, tainted with a fatal crime, but redeemed by such a price as the precious blood of Christ, made inheritor

of such a glory, should act worthy of his calling; and that, as he is different from other men in his hopes, so he ought to differ from them also in his life and in his modes of thinking, speaking, and acting. But when the time and occasion come for applying this to practice we fail. We have not faith enough to link the grand hope to the little actions. Instead of lifting up the little duties to the grand motives, we lose the grand motives in the littleness of the duties. It is a great mistake; and it strips the Christian life of that dignity and of that sweetness which might otherwise belong to it, when, like the oil upon the head of Aaron, that ran down to the skirts of his clothing, the adoring love of the heart runs fully out into the practical obedience of the life.

It seems to me that the whole of this chapter, and the energy with which the apostle presses the great motive into the details of the life, is one long witness against it. How minute are the graces enumerated; how minute, of necessity, the occasions on which alone they can be exercised; they do not belong to the few grand opportunities which occur now and then in the lives of a few, but to the practical familiarities which enter into the daily life of all. For instance, modesty of mind, affectionateness, a disposition to think more of others than ourselves; faithfulness and diligence in duty and in business; cheerfulness of heart, patience, and forbearance under trial. Is there a home upon earth in which there is not need to exercise them? a living man or woman

who has not occasion for them every hour of the day? Think not for a moment that you degrade the sublimity of religion by bringing it into contact with these details. You honour it, not degrade it. For, in truth, a minute holiness sustained in little things is so extremely difficult that nothing but a powerful motive can suffice for it. The constancy of little occasions is an incalculably greater trial of faith than a few occasional opportunities, which, as it were, rally effort, and stimulate by their greatness the courage and zeal which become weary and evaporate amid the details of daily obedience.

Nor is it only that the occasions are small in themselves, but it is also that so many secondary motives and influences become mixed up with them, and intervene between our clear sight of duty and the occasion of practising it as to throw us off our guard. To sit down quietly under an injury, to maintain unruffled quietness and sweetness of temper under the provocation of bitter words, to submit one's own will to others, to be patient under misrepresentation, contented under loss and disappointment, zealous in every duty, however small,—this indeed is the Christian hero's trial, and here must be won the Christian hero's victory. Just as in a piece of machinery, the moving force must be strong in proportion to the distance at which it needs to act; so the smallest occasions that lie, as it were, on the edge and outer confines of our life need the mightiest of motives to reach them and keep them in motion.

Is not this one lesson of the chapter? Here is the motive and its spring—the mercies of God, deep, boundless, infinite; and here is their practical issue in the saint,—"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

II.—We may extend the same truth a step further, and learn that every grace has its corresponding temptation,—the shadow, as it were, thrown by it on the sunshine of the other world. It appears to me very remarkable that, throughout the whole of the argument, each clause warns against a danger, either incident to the duty itself or arising from the one which has preceded it. For instance, in giving, is there not danger of the affectation of an air of superiority and a disposition to magnify our gift? therefore we are warned, "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity." When we are placed in a position of authority are we not often tempted to relax effort and yield to self-indulgence? therefore, he "that ruleth," let him do it "with diligence." In showing mercy is there not a danger in forgiving unwillingly, as if we reluctantly yielded to the duty of mercifulness? therefore, "he that showeth mercy" let him do it "with cheerfulness." In cultivating love to all men, is there not danger of insincerity? "therefore let love be without dissimulation."

So, on the other side, "be not slothful in busi-

ness;" for such I still believe to be the true meaning of the words, in spite of criticism. Is there not danger of becoming absorbed in it? therefore "be fervent in spirit." Yet, may not an enthusiastic energetic temper take a wrong direction? therefore let it be "serving the Lord." So in another way, "rejoicing in hope," and, therefore, because a bright hope should give us strength to bear and constancy to endure, whereas we often see persons of a bright and buoyant temperament easily depressed in sorrow, "be patient in tribulation." Then, as this twofold grace of cheerfulness and patience is not easy to human nature—though, thank God, we often see them combined in the saints of Christ—therefore, let us seek strength where alone it can be had, "continuing instant in prayer."

Thus there is a strict connection everywhere, and we need to learn from it. A little self-knowledge will convince us that, even when we do the right thing, we are apt to do it in the wrong way. The shadow and taint of our corrupt nature cling to us everywhere, and nothing but the most generous love of God sweeping away little temptations, as the strong river carries the fallen leaves upon its surface, will enable us to get rid of it. We need the most unwearying watchfulness, lest (may I say?) the gracefulness of our very graces be lost. Does not a grudging reluctance often mar our gifts, or assumption destroy the gentleness of our wills, or upbraiding

words deteriorate the exercise of our mercy? Does not diligence in business often destroy fervency of religious affection, or enthusiasm run into pleasing ourselves rather than pleasing God? Is not prayer often neglected in the hurry and bustle of our work for God? Oh, there is need to watch that all the selfish barriers which prevent the free flow of grace into every detail of the character and life may be broken down, till there shall not be an avenue of our being, nor a sphere of our action, into which it does not flow, till all our lives become a hymn of praise and all our hearts are joy.

The main thought I have thus endeavoured to elucidate is the influence of great truths on little things.

Great are the beauty and sweetness thus thrown over all our life. The whole sphere of it is elevated. The constraining motive flings its own light over every object, every affection, every interest, and even over every conflict and sacrifice. Nothing can be tame which is done from love of God; nothing mean which ends in Him; nothing small which reaches throughout eternity. God becomes the very sun of our endless existence. Just as the natural sun not only brightens and warms and quickens, but clothes all things with beauty, giving to the earth its green and to the skies their blue, so God will glorify with Himself all the details of the life devoted to His praise and regulated by His will. Such a life must

needs be great. For how large a measure of grace is involved in such a character as the apostle describes, humble of heart, devoted in the discharge of duty, full of love, "kindly affectioned one to another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer!"

XXIII.

JORDAN AT HAND.

"Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it."—JOSHUA i. 11.

THERE is a wonderful unity in all God's dealings, as being the dealings of the same Deity, and therefore exhibiting the same attributes. No weak argument for the unity of God may be drawn from the common principles which pervade alike His works of creation, providence, and redemption. One thing is set over against another, not only in compensation, as the Wise King states it, but also in what we call analogy, the likeness of things framed on the same lines and pervaded with the same principles. There is, for instance, a very striking and recognised resemblance between the early history of the ancient Jewish people and the history of an individual soul from the time of its conversion up to its final entrance into heaven. This resemblance is so recognised in the Word of God itself. For St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, founds the argument of the third and fourth chapters upon it. Having stated the

greatness of the Gospel, and the claim it has upon human faith and obedience from the dignity of the Son of God, who revealed it, he pauses to press home the appeal upon the individual conscience; and he founds the appeal upon the example of the ancient Israelites and the unbelief which finally deprived the generation which came out of Egypt of the promised land.

The analogy between the two, the history of the chosen nation of old and of every saved soul, is singularly minute and complete. Thus, the cruel bondage of Egypt, that iron furnace from which the mighty God of their forefathers delivered them, corresponds to the slavery of sin — that corrupted state in which every child of Adam is born into the world. The contrast between the free independence of the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when the patriarchs were great princes, powerful enough to conduct wars and to make treaties with kings, and the bitter slavery of the days of Moses' childhood, was not more marked than is the contrast between the original condition of man as he came, holy and unfallen, from his Creator's hands, and man as he has since become, an heir of sin and a "child of wrath," with "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually."

In the case of many souls the resemblance is yet closer, for to many and many a man the slavery begins with the guise of a coveted enjoyment, and the sin which appears pleasant at the beginning becomes a dreadful and fatal tyrant at the end.

Then it is through the experience of its sorrows that God awakens the desire for liberty. It is the last brand of slavery when a man is contented to be a slave. The Hebrew people loved Egypt only too well, and would have been content to dwell there, had it not been for the degrading labour and the relentless lash of the taskmaster, and the bloody cruelty that spared not even the infant at the breast. Under the affliction of their bondage the people cried unto God, just as the sorrows of sin make us conscious of the bitterness of sin, and we learn to hate the thing from the ruin and misery it has brought into a world which God made bright and beautiful. Then, when the desire for freedom has been awakened, there follows the conflict by which the soul is set free. Satan will not easily lose his grasp upon the soul, just as Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go. Then there comes the outstretched arm and the mighty hand of a God who chastises. It is amid judgments sore and sharp as those under which there was the great cry heard in Egypt, when, from the palace of the monarch to the hut of the beggar, there was not a house where there was not one dead, that the soul breaks its bonds and is born by conversion into spiritual liberty and life.

Amid the rapture of a new and sweet emotion, it goes forth with song and triumph from the land of bondage, and sets its face towards Canaan. But the promised land is still distant. It is not all at once that the converted heart enters into its glory. The

wilderness lies between, with its trials and conflicts, its need of patience and its blended mercies and chastisements. It may be with the soul as with the Hebrews of old, that our own unbelief prolongs the time and deepens the warfare. Could we only trust God, trust Him implicitly, all would be well. But we doubt Him, and, in the mingled timidity of unbelief and the presumption of disobedience, we provoke God's hand against us. But He leads His true people on nevertheless, and, though it be through tears and trials, Canaan comes near at last. We see in the distance its sunny slopes, perceive its fair beauty, and catch from afar its songs of rapture. But, still, Jordan rolls between, broad and deep. Who can fail to complete the parable? Canaan is the heaven of our inheritance, and Jordan is the grave and gate of death through which we pass to it.

Let us put ourselves into a position like that of the Hebrew people, and imagine that the voice of the ministry cries to us as Joshua cried of old, "Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land."

What must have been the feelings of the Hebrews and the effect of the words upon them? What should be our feelings and their effect upon ourselves?

I.—We cannot doubt that the first feeling excited by the announcement must have been that of joy and triumph. For, observe that the words do not dwell upon the act of passing; that was a mere transition,

but they pass on to the state beyond,—"to go in to possess the land." The possession of that land had been the hope of their lives. It had mingled even with their childish recollections, and had been the constant expectation of their manhood; the thought that had lightened their weariness and cheered their toils. The very words of the promise must have entered into the atmosphere of their being, and have made a part of their lives. It was "the good land," "the land flowing with milk and honey," "the land which the Lord had promised to their forefathers." The generation had drunk in the thought of it, even from their mothers' breast. Those who had perished in the wilderness were those who were men and women, more than twenty years old, when they came out of Egypt. Those whose feet should press the sacred soil, which the Son of God in flesh consecrated fifteen hundred years afterwards with His footsteps, were the children of the Exodus, and had spent the flush and strength of their manhood in the wanderings in the wilderness. And now the end was come. The weary journeys were to cease. The promised rest was at hand, ay, within three days,—and think you that they turned away at last from realising the hope of their lifetime, and did not welcome it with joy? How strangely unnatural would it have been if they had shrunk from it, and had complained because their inheritance was at hand.

Not less strangely unnatural is the gloom and sadness, the fear and horror, with which Christians

too often contemplate their own passage into the heavenly Canaan. Yet we, too, from our earliest infancy have heard and thought of heaven. The joys of the sinless world have mingled with the lispings of our first prayers. Its condition of infinite rapture, unutterable and unmeasurable, has filled the child's fancy, fired the burning imagination of early years, and occupied the wondering thoughts and reverent conjectures of our riper age. Heaven is the romance of human life; but a romance as real as it is fascinating. The Canaan of the ancient Hebrew was but a scene of change and further conflict; after all, how unlike in this respect to the inheritance "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away!" Yet the Hebrew delighted in the thought of it, and that probably for the selfsame reason that makes heaven so sweet to us. It is the prospect of its rest. I suspect that this was the sweetest thought of all. It was not alone on the contrast between its fountains and depths springing out of valleys and hills, and the arid desolation of the great howling wilderness, that the thoughts of the Hebrew rested, but on the contrast of its repose. The sorest trials of his life had not probably been the hunger and the thirst, the laborious journey and the tumult of the battle, but the ceaseless motion—the movement ever on and on without apparent reason, the impossibility of settling down anywhere; the seeking, craving for repose. Rest, rest! rest anywhere, but, above all, in the land that flowed with milk and honey, must have been the

innermost desire of his heart. Hitherto he had possessed nothing which was his own; his life was a pilgrimage ever, but not a home: but Canaan would be home.

Is not all this applicable to ourselves? It is not the great sorrows of our experience that constitute, after all, the weariness of life; but it is its change, its sense of uncertainty, the consciousness that we keep nothing, call nothing absolutely our own. Mortality is everywhere; the ominous word "decay" is written on everything,—on the fresh brow of the infant and the downy cheek of the blushing child as on the gathering wrinkles of old age; on the earth itself, its everlasting hills and restless sea, nay, on the very skies on which we look, which shall hereafter be rolled up as a scroll in the day of the Lord's coming. Everywhere there is change. This makes the head faint and the heart sick. But there will be no change in heaven: rest, rest for ever!

How strange, then, that we should associate aught but pleasure with the thought of it; that we should dread to hear it named; that we should push it from us, and keep it at arm's length; that we should become grave and sad when we hear it spoken of, and should chide the thoughtless tongue that has thrown the name of the other world as a cloud over our joy. How strange and unnatural it is thus to avoid what should enter most into our thoughts, and should pervade our very life. I am sure it is a great mistake. If there be sadness in the thought of removing into

another life, it is only because there is strangeness to it. Make it familiar and habitual, and the pain will be gone, and nothing but the joy remain.

Let not the light die out of thine eye, Christian, nor the cheerfulness from thy tongue, nor the colour blanch upon thy cheek, but let them sparkle all the more when thou dost think of heaven, and most of all when thou shalt be told, "Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land."

II.—But while the predominant thought in the mind of the Hebrews must have been joy, there must likewise have blended with it a great trial of faith. At first, probably, it was Canaan, and only Canaan, which occupied their minds; but after a little while it is scarcely possible that the mode of their entry into Canaan should not have occurred to them. The chosen land was indeed close at hand. It seemed as if they could almost touch the shore. Just beyond gleamed in the sunshine the towers of Jericho, and blue in the distance were the hills of Judea. But, close as they seemed, Jordan rolled between, and they could not but ask how they were to cross it. The command itself recalled it to their recollection, for it laid emphasis on the words, "this Jordan:" "Ye shall pass over this Jordan." Why this Jordan, but because it was Jordan at the worst, Jordan in inundation? The sacred narrative specifies the fact that, "Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest." It is at all times a difficult military opera-

tion to cross a river in the face of a watchful foe; and here it was not an army to be taken across, but a nation, with women and children and a mixed multitude, and all the tents and baggage inseparable from their movements. It is impossible but that many and many a Hebrew soldier, as he watched the strong rushing stream, should not have asked the question, How?

Yet the assurance was positive,—"Within three days ye shall pass over;" and is not,—faith must have argued,—is not the God of the covenant able to keep His word? Is it not He who divided the Red Sea, and made the deep into dry land? Is it not He that smote Egypt and overthrew Pharaoh and his host? Is it not He who showed His power upon Mount Sinai, at whose word the hard rock gave forth the springing water, and who had fed them with angels' food in the wilderness? Is not He the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and had He not shown by countless acts of grace that they were His people and His inheritance? Should they not trust Him to help them now, as He had helped them before? Gloriously, we know, God fulfilled His word, and through the depths of Jordan, touched by the sacred feet of them that bore the ark of the covenant, made a way for His ransomed to pass over. Must not the consternation have been great in Jericho, as they watched from their towers the crossing hosts and caught the distant echo of their songs?

What, then, of that other Jordan, which we all must cross? that death we must all die some time or other, and through which alone we can enter into our Canaan? shall that be more fearful to us than Jordan to the Hebrews, when we have the same God to lead us safely through? What of that Jordan? I say that we should dismiss this act of crossing from our thoughts, and let it not distract for a moment the soul's quiet resting on that bright land beyond.

Let us make sure that what awaits us beyond on the other shore is heaven, and not the darkness. With the act of dying we have nothing whatever to do. It is in God's hands, not ours, and there we must leave it. Has not the ark gone before? Thou art with us, O great Shepherd, and Thy rod and staff comfort us; this is enough—the rest we leave with Thee. Time, place, mode, we leave them in Thine hand, content with the assurance that Thou wilt fulfil Thy word. As for death we will not think of it, still less fear it; no, not though it be close at hand, though the message come to us, "In three days ye shall pass over this Jordan."

III.—There was, lastly, an act of preparation needed. "Prepare you victuals; for within three days," etc. Nor can we doubt, that in the immediate prospect of Canaan other preparations were also made. It is true that for forty years their raiment had not waxed old upon the Hebrews; but their equipments

must have been worn with long use, and their weapons perchance rusted with exposure. At all events, we cannot doubt that those three days were busy days within the camp of Israel, and that hammers must have rung, and busy hands toiled to prepare for the great crisis of their fortunes.

There is nothing actually corresponding to this in the experience of the Christian, when he is called to cross into the better land. Special preparation for heaven the Christian needs none. If he be in Christ, that is enough; he is safe. If he be a believer, he can have no less; and though he were the highest of saints that ever caught the light of the face of God, he could have no more than to be "found in Him, not having his own righteousness, but that which is of Christ by faith." For myself I can conceive nothing more blessed, than for a saint to pass at once from the midst of his work for his Master into the enjoyment of his Master's presence. Even with the Hebrews it was no preparation of their own that was to cleave Jordan for them, but the power of their covenant God. So with us it is Christ—no preparation or courage of our own, but Christ, who has taken the sting from death and the victory from the grave. Art thou a true Christian? Then thou art at all times and in all places prepared to die, and to pass into thine inheritance. If not in Christ, we never can be ready, and no preparation that human philosophy can supply can make us ready.

Yet I admit, that the near sight of so great

change could not but very solemnly affect us, were the warning given to ourselves, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live"—"within three days thou shalt pass over this Jordan." There would be an intense revival of faith and hope, and in that close sight of heaven a flinging away of all earthly and temporal ties. But this quickening effect, which I admit that the announcement of approaching death would work upon us, should it not be produced by the very absence of the announcement, and by that solemn uncertainty which God permits to rest over the time of our departure? We may, perhaps, hear the very announcement that a few days or a few hours will usher us into the better world; but in every case we know that it may be so, at any time. There is not a man living who can deny that within three days he may be with God, or who has the slightest shadow of security that he shall live even three hours.

The very uncertainty is full of warning eloquence. The thought should come to us like one of those messages from God which every now and then revive the soul's hope, and place us face to face with the world unseen. Are we really in Christ, saved and at peace, or are we only intending, doubting, hesitating about a Saviour not yet sought—a salvation not yet found. Would the words be as a cry out of the world of torment, or like a strain of the everlasting song should we hear the announcement now: "Within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan?"

XXIV.

THE HABITUAL THOUGHT OF DEATH NOT PAINFUL.

"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live."—ISAIAH xxxviii. 1.

THE time will of necessity come when to every man that lives these words will be spoken. I do not mean that any commissioned prophet like Isaiah will utter them with an audible voice in our ears. But God Himself will speak them in the manifest dealings of His providence, making this well known to us in some way, which our own hearts will instinctively interpret. It has been my lot, not unfrequently in my life, to be an actual messenger like Isaiah, and to say, "Thou must die, and not live;" and I never yet found a case, in which the mind of the sufferer was not more or less consciously prepared for it. To each one of ourselves it must come a little sooner or a little later, and come when there can be no prospect of reversal, as there was to Hezekiah, but come as the final and unalterable decree of God. We may know it a few days, a few hours, a few minutes, before the event, but the

interval between the known sentence and its accomplishment will rapidly pass away; pass away, I trust, not in desperate efforts to forget or to resist, but in the peaceful preparation of those who know in whom they have believed, who are not afraid to trust their all to Him, and who enjoy that deep and wonderful peace which it is the habit of God to bestow upon His dying saints.

But, however this may be, the interval will pass away, and the actual moment come when we shall die and not live. We shall gaze our last on earthly things, exchange the last glance with weeping eyes, press for the last time the loving hands of our dear ones, whisper or look the last farewell, and then we shall depart. These familiar frames of flesh and blood will be left to the last offices of friends; but we ourselves, the feeling, thinking, conscious part of us, shall not cease to be, nor, I fancy, lose consciousness for a moment. We shall have gone; but into what world? amid what wonders shall we stand? what beings shall we see? into what presence shall we enter?

Many will have sought, like myself, to realise that moment, and have strained imagination and faith to their utmost in the effort to pierce the veil beyond, and understand how we shall feel. The effort is indeed all in vain. The impenetrable darkness, alike impenetrable whether it be the darkness of excessive glory or of an unutterable gloom, throws us back and frustrates all the effort. Conjectures, guesses,

fancies, we may conjure up, but they have neither definiteness nor certainty in them. Yet the effort will not be altogether in vain, for the attention of the mind will, at all events, give increased reality to the fact of the great change and of the transit from one world into another, if it will do no more. It will serve to dissipate the throng of delusions that cloud it. Before the intensity of that gaze one earthly thing after another will disappear, till the fact of the change stands out in all its single solemnity, and we look at it face to face, without a lingering earthly disturbance to cloud its distinctness as earth-born mists cloud the sun, and to clothe the fact with terrors not its own.

I confess that I think this undistracted concentrated gaze at the great change a healthy thing. I advocate it, not as a matter of sentiment or of sensation, nor that we may realise ourselves as the centre of a pathetic scene, nor to conjure up beforehand all the circumstances of the event till the heart is harrowed up with the horror of them: not so: for, anticipate them as we will, the actual circumstances will probably be very different from our expectations; and, moreover, we have no right to take them out of God's hands into our own. We have nothing to do with dying. Let us dismiss it from our minds, and check the tendency of the imagination to dwell morbidly upon it. It is not, however, my object to repress the thought of dying, but to intensify the reality of this world and the other, and the relation

between the two, and to make the state that is to end and the state that is to begin part of our habitual thoughts, so that we may adjust our whole life in regard to them.

Why should we shrink from the thought of death, or why should it be painful to us? I do not think it is painful, and I am sure that it need not be. If there be pain, it is simply and solely because the thought is not habitual. Any disturbance and interruption in our common mode of thinking is painful, especially if we are conscious of foolishly acting on a supposition which we know to be untrue, and of forgetting a fact which we know to be true. Have we not been conscious in familiar life of suddenly recalling something which we had forgotten, and which we ought to have done, and of the vexation and self-upbraiding regret that it has caused us? The feeling is just of the same kind when the memory of death now and then flashes upon us, as if we were haunted by an apparition from which we strove vainly to escape. If we have perseveringly accustomed ourselves to think only of the world on this side of the grave, and to forget the world on the other side, and then we recollect the tremendous error, it is no wonder that it should be painful, for it is the sting of remorse, the consciousness of a deep sin and of a great blunder, which yet we have not the courage to correct. This, however, is what we make death to be,—but what is it in itself? The terror is in us, not in it. Let the thoughts habitually extend over

both states, and it will be gone; the strangeness will all disappear. The mind will be in harmony with the facts, and if in some small degree the brightness of life be subdued, it will be only as the slanting shades of summer evening soften the glare and make the landscape more beautiful than before.

I ask, therefore, why should we be afraid to think of death? Do you reply that there is in man a natural love of life? No doubt there is. But what, then, is that true life which lies beyond, and to which the act of departure, which we call death, is but the entrance? What we have in this present state is but a very imperfect life—imperfect, not only because too often it is the union of a living body and a dead soul, but imperfect, also, in the body itself. What weakness, what weariness, what wants, what indispositions, what aches and pains and foreshadows of the grave! All these belong to death, not to life, and that state is but half living and half dying of which they form so large a share. The real life, the perfect life, will be hereafter; a full abounding life, with every pulse beating with vigour and with joy. For a short time we may have on earth such a state of perfect health and vigour that there is pleasure in the very act of moving. This experience may give some poor conception of what perfect life will be, when it fills both body and soul, without defect, without weariness, without exhaustion, without end —a ceaseless strain of music, of which every note is joy and every cadence praise.

Or, do you say that we are naturally repelled from mortality, and that we shrink from thinking of the lifeless and decaying flesh? I admit it, and there is a necessary and wholesome lesson in the bitterness of it, for how should we know what sin was without some little conception of what death was? But I plead that this is but for a time, till the body shall rise again in glory. I plead that the horror is to those who live and who watch the dead, not to the dead themselves. The lifeless flesh has no consciousness of its own lifelessness—no sensibility to the silence and stillness, the darkness, the coffin, or the grave. It is as if the eyes closed one moment, and then the next moment opened on the unseen world. Nor can we suppose that the soul is painfully conscious of its separation, or pines after the flesh it has left. The disembodied spirit is in bliss in "Abraham's bosom," and in the presence of its Lord. And though the time may be actually long, as man counts time, between death and the resurrection, yet are we not conscious that the effect of great happiness is to destroy the sense of time, with such sweet swiftness does it pass when the heart is occupied with the objects of its love? Think you eternity will seem long? The soul's life will be, not time, but eternity.

Or, do you say that you fear death because it will stop for ever all the plans and schemes and activities of life? Do you think so? Do you think that the state into which we shall enter will be a passive

calm—a stagnant delight in everlasting sleeping, as sleeps the dark lake beneath the shelter of the lofty mountain? If so, I cannot wonder that you shrink from death. But God never tells us that death is a passive calm, and I do not so conceive of it. Every hint and word in Scripture appears to me to point to something very different. I think of delightful activity and glorious occupation, and ever-increasing knowledge, and employment before the presence of God,—of enlarged capacities and powers like those of the angels, of whom we are told that "He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire."

Or, do you say that you shrink from the idea of never seeing again the blooming earth and the blue skies and the sweet flowers, and losing all the sights and sounds that make this world beautiful? Again, I think that you are wrong. Certainly all the imagery of the Bible suggests a different conclusion. It seems to me that as we shall have bodies hereafter, so there must be a local world in which they shall live; and as they will be the same bodies, they will have senses of seeing and hearing and touching, as they have now. I cannot conceive that the resurrection will destroy any part of the body, though it may enlarge all its powers. Therefore, as the risen body will have glorified senses, I conclude that in the local heaven there will be objects on which the senses can be occupied, and with which they will be delighted—therefore, sights and sounds so fair, so wonderful, so exquisite, as to pass imagination. If earth be beautiful, oh, what will heaven be!

Or, do you say that you dread death because you cannot bear to think of parting from those you love, and losing that sweet intercourse, and that happy interchange of mutual affection, which spring from love; the gentle faces, the sweet voices, the pleasant songs of earth? Well, all separation is painful; but in itself, and of necessity, this separation need only be for a time,—a brief parting, with an eternal reunion beyond it, when, free from the little hindrances that mar a perfect love on earth, we shall renew a pure affection, consecrated for ever by the seen presence of God. If we have those on earth whom we are sorry to lose even for a time, have we not those in heaven whom we have lost for a time and shall be glad to meet again,—the bright faces of our young ones, and the divine beauty and grace of older saints? Meanwhile, is there not One above all, whose presence will compensate for a thousand losses, whom it will be life to see, and heaven to enjoy? "Absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord:"

> "For ever with the Lord!
> Amen, so let it be;
> Life from the dead is in that word;
> 'Tis immortality."

But once more, do you say that you dread to think of death because you are not certain of your state before God, and because dreadful misgivings haunt you as to whether you are ready for the great change? Ah! here we reach the deepest secret of all, the true source of the uneasiness

with which men think of their mortality. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law;" for it is when we contrast ourselves with the holy law of God that we feel our sin. It is, I fear, not more certain that men die, than it is that many die unpardoned; nay, that many perish, members, it may be, of Christian congregations, familiar with the form of godliness all their life, knowing the name of Christ, but ignorant of His power and beauty, not one with Him, not converted out of their natural state, with no true sorrow for sin, however they may dread the punishment of it; familiar with saying prayers, but not with praying. It is a dreadful thought, but a thought from which we dare not shrink. We must not venture, indeed, to feed the imagination with the horrors of the world of woe, but neither must we permit the soul to doubt their reality. Oh, dreadful thought, dreadful even to the mind of God, that souls perish! ay, and what is worst of all, perish by their own fault, with salvation placed within their grasp. The Eternal Father is ready to forgive; the Eternal Son sufficient to atone; the Eternal Spirit almighty to convert and sanctify; all ready; nay, all pleading, inviting, expostulating, entreating, and yet rejected. Was there ever in creation so ghastly and terrible a suicide as man! Yes, here let us look, and search and search again our own hearts, whether we are in the faith—not whether we are sinless, none are sinless; not whether we are perfect, none are perfect here; not

whether we serve God as we ought to do, that will only be done in heaven; but whether we die in Christ—washed, justified, sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

We are now in a position to deal with the last difficulty of all. Do you say that you dread to think of death because the thought saddens and darkens life? Surely this is no longer true, if, accepted in Christ Jesus, we have peace with God. It may be sad, that this life is short and mortal; but the fact is not changed, whether we think of it or not. We do not die because we think of death, and we do not avoid dying because we forget it: the fact remains all the same in any case. We only lose the comfort and aggravate the terror by forgetting it. But what then? Is it sad to think of an endless life, perfect, infinite, absolute—of an eternal existence of joy? sad to think that when we close our eyes on one world, it will only be to open them immediately on another and a better world? sad to look forward to an endless state when we and our loved saints shall together dwell with Christ? Is time sad, because eternity will be glorious? Am I to be wretched to-day, because I have the promise of endless bliss to-morrow? Oh no; assuredly not; and experience totally disproves it. It would be strange indeed if the sun darkened anything. There is not a pleasure in life, be it what it may, however familiar, trivial, or small, which is not brightened by the Christian's everlasting future. Life is more

enjoyable, love more dear, home more pleasant, sleep sweeter, recreations more refreshing, the very food we eat more wholesome, because the soul, calm and peaceful in its deep trust on Christ, stretches its hopes habitually through the grave and gate of death into the everlasting world beyond.

Thus I would strip the thought of death of all its terrors, and blend it with our habitual thoughts and conduct. I have endeavoured to speak soberly and reasonably, to give both worlds their due, not to disparage this short life, but to make it more valuable, more precious, more pleasant, in view of its relation to that long life which is to follow it. There is not a single thought, not a single conceivable position, which is not brightened by this consideration, just as the dullest object on earth may be clothed with picturesqueness and beauty by the bright glory of the radiant sunrise. The actual language of death is changed by it. In the language of men the announcement is, Thou shalt die, and not live; but in the language of heaven it is the reverse, Thou shalt live, and not die.

THE METHODS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

"All these things are against me."—GENESIS xlii. 36.
"All things work together for good to them that love God."—ROMANS viii. 28.

IF the yearly re-perusal of the same passages of Scripture has some drawbacks, it certainly has some very special advantages. Its drawbacks consist in the familiarity with the passages read, and the consequent temptation to inattention which arises from familiarity. On the other hand, its special advantages consist in the renewal of the same lesson, and the opportunity of deepening year by year the impressions that each preceding year had left behind it. The identity of the lesson stands in contrast with the progressive character of our experience, and constitutes a kind of standard by which our advancement or retrogression in the school of Christ may be measured. If the impression has become deeper, and a clearer insight has been obtained into the Word and ways of God, then there is an improvement. If year by year we feel the lesson less, and it comes less keenly home to the soul's blunted sensibilities, then there must be retrogression. Such as our own spiritual state is, such will be the judg-

ment we are likely to form of God's dealings with us. If the great lesson of our lives be still unlearned, then, devoid of personal acquaintance with God in Christ, we are likely to repeat Jacob's querulous complaint—though no doubt we shall be wrong, as he was wrong,—"All these things are against me."

To the eye of the flesh, and in the measurement of outward things, we cannot deny that he was right. He had drank deeply of sorrow, and keenly and bitterly had the shadow of his early sins been reflected back upon himself. The death of his beloved Rachel, and the intensity of the love with which he clung to the children she had borne him, deepened, no doubt, by the unkind disobedience and misconduct of his elder sons; the loss of Joseph, the child of his old age, and the bloody death by which he believed him to have perished; the anxiety caused by the deepening famine in Canaan; the detention of Simeon; the vague fears awakened by the sons' narration of the treatment they had received in Egypt; and now, last of all, the hard necessity of parting with his darling Benjamin; all, no doubt, sank deeply into his heart and embittered it with many a pang. To the impatience of his human ignorance it all seemed to be against him. And yet we knew that he was wrong. It was all for him. It was so even temporally, for each occurrence was a link in the chain whereby God provided a home for Jacob and his household during the sore famine of Canaan, and, looking beyond Jacob himself, whereby He prepared a refuge in Goshen, in which the family

was to grow into a nation and be prepared for its future greatness. If we look further, to Jacob's soul and the souls of his sons, he was still more wrong: for God was teaching them in His own wondrous way. No doubt each pang had its work in removing from Jacob's heart his self-will and the old inveterate leaven of worldly subtlety and craft, and leading him to see in others the guilt of his own soul. And as for his sons,—were not all the circumstances arranged to touch their consciences, and make them feel their sin against Joseph? It was in the anguish of their own souls that they exclaimed, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." Was not God doing all this in love? Jacob's exclamation was caused by ignorance. How often we copy him! "All these things are against me," we say. But the answer comes back from the loving heart of God, sure and unmistakable as Himself, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

Now I do not propose to dwell further on Jacob's mistake, but, assuming it to be recognised, I wish to use the history as an illustration of the working of God's providence with His people.

I.—I notice that God works through secondary instruments. The fore-determined purpose was to provide for Jacob and for his race; and we know that this purpose was accomplished. Jacob spent his declining years in peace and plenty beneath the shadow of his son's greatness. Twenty years of quiet

repose closed his adventurous and troubled life, happy in the society and love of his sons, and strong (as his last predictions assure us) in his faith in the promises of God. So also the race was secure from the incessant wars and dangers of Canaan. In the land of Goshen they grew into a nation, till, through the agency of the Egyptian king, God sent them forth upon their destiny a great and conquering people.

But think, how many links in the chain of events there were to bring about this result, how many secondary causes were at work! The seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine; the old man's love for Joseph, and the envy it awakened in the hearts of his brethren; the deepening of their anger by Joseph's dreams, and by the vanity of the boy in telling them; the bloody purpose frustrated by Reuben's intervention; the chance meeting with the Ishmaelite traders, who bought the boy during Reuben's absence; the lustful spite of Potiphar's wife and the injustice of Potiphar; the agency of the imprisoned butler; the dreams of the night that troubled Pharaoh's sleep with fears he could not dispel; the revelation of the dreams to Joseph, and Joseph's elevation as Viceroy of Egypt,—all had their place. How varied the causes. The silent order of nature, the bad passions of man, the apparent accidents of travel, the vain visions of the night, all concurred,—but why? Was it some happy accident alone that blended them all together? Do great results spring out of blind causes? or do the accidents of a

world of chance accomplish the promises of a God of truth? Surely not. They all concurred because God was in them all, through them all, over them all. The design, the purpose, the intelligence, the power were of God, and other things, dead or living, animate or inanimate, were His instruments.

If Joseph's brethren, when in their hatred they sold him to the Ishmaelites, or Potiphar's wife, when she foully libelled Joseph to his master, had been told that they were but links in the purpose of God, and that this purpose was the exaltation of the young Hebrew to be the most powerful man in Egypt, how astonished they would have been? how much perhaps have ridiculed the notion? Yet it was true nevertheless. An unseen power was overruling all. That truth is ever true. In the centre of all causes, all influence, all things, sits God. "The dragons and deeps, the fire and hail, the snow and vapours, the wind and storm, fulfil His word." The wicked are but a sword of His, and the very wrath of men praises Him. If you look back to your own lives, must you not recognise in each of your cases, as in the case of Jacob, the number of small things that have all concurred to make yourselves and your position in the world what they are. Perhaps some accident, even of wind and weather, a sickness, an apparent disappointment, the unkindness of a friend, the failure of a message—may have changed all the current of your lives. Many can see cases where it has been so, and probably it is so in a

vast number of cases that you do not know. Do you suppose, that all these things come and go by chance? If they did, this would be a very frightful world, for we should be the helpless victims of some formless, senseless, mindless, heartless, reasonless, purposeless thing which we call "chance," simply because we do not know what it is. It would be dreadful to live in such a world. But, thank God, it is not so. All the rays of light that flood our earth with beauty do not more truly meet in the sun, than the issues and results of everything meet in the hand of God. Does not the thought bring God very near to us? Does it not make our life very wonderful? Say not, in your fretful impatience, that all things are against you, lest perchance you blaspheme God, for it is He who plans and orders all, and all things that exist are but the instruments of His power.

II.—I notice the complexity and reach of the Divine government, extending so far and involving so much as to be wholly beyond our power to understand it. Surely none but God can measure God. For men to bring God's dealings to the bar of their own judgment, and to declare this to be right and this to be wrong, because they, forsooth, approve it or disapprove it, is the most unreasonable contradiction ever thought of. If you deny that there is a God, and therefore affirm that there is nothing higher in the world than the mind of man, you may measure the

world by yourself. But I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for the man who does so; for what wretchedly mean conceptions of wisdom, power, and goodness he must have, who can make man his highest ideal of them. Such a conclusion is absurd enough, considering man's ignorance of a thousand things that enter into his daily life. But it is still more absurd to admit that there is a God, and then assert that man can measure Him or understand Him. If He be not beyond our reach and understanding, He cannot be God. We know only that which is before our eyes, and can not measure Him or His doings.

Was it not so with Jacob? He felt the pressure of the present sorrow. He knew not that it was all working for him, and in his ignorance exclaimed, "It is all against me." Could he have seen with his mind's eye the happy home of his closing years; could he have pictured the mighty nation sprung of his loins, that was to be cradled in Egypt and to go out with a mighty hand; could he have witnessed the imperial glory God gave them in the promised land; could he have been told that the object of God was to provide a chosen race, of which the Son of God was to spring, and that the object of this Incarnation was to save the souls of mankind; could he even have conceived such a civilisation as the Gospel has given ourselves, or, yet more, have witnessed with prophetic eye the countless company of the saved who shall be gathered into glory; could

he have seen all this, and then have been told that the events in his own life, of which he complained, were but necessary parts of a plan of which heaven would be the crown and climax, would not his complaint have been hushed into silence, or, rather, have swollen into praise?

Yes, it is all true; and He who saw the end from the beginning, promised in His wisdom what He accomplished by His power. Let us learn the humbling lesson of the inability of the human mind to judge of God; content to know what He has been pleased teach us, let us trust Him for the rest. There are many questions in the present day respecting which we need this lesson; for if we cannot understand that part of God's dealings which touches ourselves, how shall we measure the whole, of which the universe will be the sphere and eternity the duration? Some of the doctrines of Scripture appear to be inconsistent with each other. Shall I foolishly reject them, simply because they do not seem to be congruous with what I think God ought to do? Such an argument would only repeat on a greater scale the mistake of Jacob, when he took upon himself to judge God, and to pronounce that God was wrong. Cannot men be content to take God's Word as they find it, and leave God to vindicate His own character in His own time? Have you not reason enough to trust God, and to distrust yourselves? "All these things are against me." What! Dost thou know God, and canst thou by searching

find out the Almighty? "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it."

III.—But, lastly, let us learn to have confidence in the love of God and the fulfilment of all His gracious purposes towards us. Had Jacob forgotten the voice that spoke to him in Bethel—"I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father; I will not leave thee till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." But he distrusted God, and peevishly complained that all things were against him. God was faithful, and all things were for him, not against him. Let us not fall into his mistake. To the blinded eye of the flesh indeed there may seem darkness and trouble on every side of us, our wishes thwarted, our hopes destroyed, our loved ones taken away—every comfort wrecked, till the heart cries out, I have nothing left to live for—yet when that time of bitterness comes to us, let us not forget the promise, "All things work together for good to them that love God"—the exact meaning is,—"all things are working together for good," at this very moment, when the anguish is in thine heart, and the complaint is yet quivering upon thy lips.

Hold that truth close to thy soul, Christian, for, be thy present lot what it may, the time will surely come when you will need it, and need to hold fast to it. There is nothing that can happen to a man, which that promise does not convert into praise—no, not

even death itself, that last and worst of all terrors, as the natural man deems it. God makes even that beautiful, for to one who has fast hold on Jesus it is but the threshold of everlasting life. What matters it how it comes,—in the maturity of life, or in the bloom of manhood? Come when and how it will, we will meet it with the same strain of triumph. "All this is against me," cries the world. "All this is for me," echoes back the Christian; "thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

XXVI.

PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE RESURRECTION.

'Wherefore comfort one another with these words."—1 THESS. iv. 18.

THERE are few things more astounding than the mode in which a large number of men and women wilfully put out of sight the prospect of death and of the world beyond. They are perhaps persons of good sense, shrewd and calculating in all earthly things, and accustomed to look forward with prudent forecast to the ordinary contingencies of human life. And yet the close of this life and the state beyond are wilfully forgotten; and they live precisely as they would do, if they were to live here for ever. They know full well that death is the most certain of all events, nay, the only certain event—the one contingency which may happen at any time, and which must happen before very long to every one among us. They have a full head belief in the judgment which lies beyond, and the two states in which it will issue. They appreciate the fact that the farther life will be an endless life. And yet, in spite of all this, they wilfully push it out of their thoughts. Now and then, perhaps, the sight of it is forced upon them by the sickness and death of some member of their family;

and then there is constantly seen in such persons a violent excessive passionate grief, which, like a brief thunder-storm, exhausts itself by its very intensity, and soon relapses into the previous indifference. Indeed every effort is made to lose the impression by plunging more deeply into the world either of pleasure or of business, and driving out the wholesome seriousness as soon as possible by lighter thoughts.

It is most desirable, that the true character of this carelessness should be properly understood. It is the effort of the mind to escape from thoughts too solemn to be endured. It is not really the effect of lightness of heart, but rather the indication of an inward intolerable fear. The thought of death is like an inflamed finger of the hand, too painful, sore, and sensitive to bear touching; and so the sufferer wraps it up, and tries to forget it. I have read of a person who, in health, was always fancying herself ill, and parading her imaginary ailments for the sympathy of her friends. She subsequently became really ill, and with an incurable complaint, which was the sure precursor of a premature death. As it grew upon her all her habits were changed, and, as she was previously accustomed to talk of illness which was fanciful, so now she endeavoured to conceal, both from herself and from others, an illness that was real. She took refuge in excessive gaiety; but it was false, forced, unnatural—a mere mask for an inward fear, the expression of her secret consciousness of a truth so terrible that she could not

face it. Such a case is thoroughly true to human nature; and just thus, I am sure, it is with the ordinary forgetfulness of death and of the other world. It is not due to real lightness of heart, but is the cloak of inward heaviness, the mask of hidden terror, which recognises a fact which it has not the courage and manliness to face. I may compare such persons to a man under a delusion. There have been cases where men have thought themselves haunted with some hideous shape. It has had no reality. There was nothing actually present. It was a mere phantom of a disordered brain; but the sufferer has fancied it to be ever with him. He has tried to forget it in society and excitement, but in the midst of his gaiety has ever kept looking stealthily round to see if the form was still there, thus betraying how keenly he remembered at the very time what he seemed to be most forgetting.

Just so it is with the mass of mankind in respect to death. It is not, perhaps, to be wondered at; for, to unconverted and worldly persons, death must indeed be very terrible; and they have no consolations whatever to support them under it, no belief that can help them, no source of courage against a moral cowardice. How blessedly different the condition of a Christian man! I do not say how blessedly different it will be hereafter, by the whole distance between heaven and hell, but how blessedly different it is even now. An unconverted man has his all behind him on this side of the grave, and nothing

but darkness before him on the other side. We have as much as he has here, and yet our best and brightest and happiest is all to come. Our life is still in front, filled with wonderful things which surpass imagination. St. Paul wrote the words of my text evidently to mourners, but we may well extend them to all Christians. Certainly no more delightful subject of conversation, no closer bond of mutual affection, can be found than this. Shall we not speak to each other of our expectations, just as the members of a friendly group, who have schemed a party of pleasure, talk to each other to-day of the enjoyment for which they look to-morrow, and thus "comfort one another with these words?"

The exhortation evidently includes the whole preceding passage, so far as it refers to the special subject of the future state. I propose so to use it, hastily bringing together the animating and glorious truths which the spirit of the apostle has revealed for the comfort of the saints.

I.—The context states the identity of the saint after the resurrection and before it. We shall be the same persons hereafter, that we are here. It is a very true and simple thing to say, and yet if we think of it, it includes a truth that throws wonderful light on the future state of the saint and answers many of the questions which a devout curiosity—if I may venture so to call it—naturally asks concerning the future. The identity of the saint here and

hereafter, as one and the same person, is involved in the phrase that we shall be raised again. *We*—we ourselves, not some one else. We do not mean that God will create some new beings and call them by our names, just as a ship may be broken up and a new ship may be built and called by the same name, in order to perpetuate the remembrance of some gallant battle with which the old ship was associated. Surely we do not mean this by the resurrection. It will not be that, when I die, I shall perish, and that God will then make some one else, and call him by my name. That would be no comfort to me, no strength to me in my sorrows, no animating hope to sustain me in my conflicts. But, surely, it is that I myself, the very selfsame being who speaks and thinks at this moment—I myself shall be raised again, and enter upon a new and endless life. So with each one of us. *We*, not other beings in our name and place, but *we* in our actual personal identity will be raised to life again at the last day.

But will there be no change between what we are now and what we shall be then? No doubt there will. For instance, all sin will be taken away from us, and therefore all the effects of sin, both upon the body and the soul—its stains, its pollutions, its struggles, its doubts and fears, its moral sufferings, and the cloudy veil which it hangs between us and God—all this will be removed. Altogether higher powers will be imparted—to the

body acuter senses, senses made capable even of seeing God; keener sensitiveness to enjoyment and higher motive powers, for we shall be "equal to the angels," and they, we know, are swift as a flame of fire to do the Lord's will. A corresponding change will be wrought in the mind and heart. But all this will be a higher state of ourselves. There will be no such change as to destroy our identity, for that would really destroy the fact of the resurrection. We shall know ourselves to be the same then as now. This is the very pith of the promise, the very essence and substance of the doctrine. *We*,—we shall ever be with the Lord.

But see what it involves. In the first place, our bodies will be the same. I do not say materially the same, and that the very identical atoms which compose our frame of flesh *now* will compose our frame *then*. For we are told that these are always changing, and are never quite the same two hours together. It is said that, in the course of a few years, all the materials of the body are changed. What then? Will any one say that his body is not the same body to-day that it was seven years ago? Not only the same to his own consciousness, but also to the consciousness of others—the same in its features and personal peculiarities, so that it can be recognised. So, after the resurrection, the body will be the same in like manner. We shall know it and feel it to be the same. The body that will suffer in the world of torment will be

the same that has been pampered with sin here on earth. The body that will be clothed with light and glory in heaven will be the same that the saint has kept under and brought into subjection here below, in which the confessor has suffered and the martyr has died. What a recompense of suffering for the one, of glory for the other!

But will it not be so likewise with our mental and moral selves? Each man has his own individuality and his own distinct character, and we know that though conversion stamps upon all men the common likeness of God, yet it does not in the least degree wipe away the differences which make us what we are, by virtue of which we are ourselves, and not others. It is this variety which gives a charm to life, and I doubt not it will survive in the better world. But the truth reaches yet farther, and includes the memories, the associations, the individual affections and personal experiences which make up human life. Take away all these from me, and let me be as if I had never known them. Should I any longer be myself? No, I should have ceased to be myself, and have become another being. Be sure God does not give us all these, that they may perish in the grave. The gross fleshly relationships of earth will no doubt pass away. "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage;" but we press the truth too far, it seems to me, when we sweep away from our ideas of the future all that mass of memories, affections, and associations, that make us what we are.

Whatever is part of our being will survive in a higher state. We shall be ourselves still. We shall ever be with the Lord.

II.—But from this follows, I think beyond a doubt, the truth of mutual recognition and of society in the better world. It is a principle clearly asserted that whatever may be proved by God's Word is as certainly true as whatever may be read therein. Not only the direct statement, but also the necessary inference is true. If we are to be ourselves hereafter, retaining either in the world of glory or in the world of torment all those personal peculiarities which make us what we are, then we must be recognisable, and recognised. The language of the apostle in this place involves it. He is writing to members who had recently lost some dear friend by death, and his object is to comfort them under the bereavement. He instructs their ignorance that they might "not sorrow as others that have no hope." And the truth he teaches is, that they had not lost their dear ones for ever: "for them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him;" and as He brings them with Him, we which "are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet Him in the air." They had but gone before, and would be brought back again for an eternal reunion; but reunion with whom? Surely with the very identical beings we had lost. They will be themselves, and we shall know them to be themselves.

Why particular intimacies should cease in heaven, or be thought inconsistent with the perfections of the higher state, I cannot conceive. Even our blessed Lord, in the spotless perfection of His human nature, had special affections; witness the love between Him and John, and that He bore for Lazarus and his sisters. It is common to say that we are social creatures; surely that capacity for social intercourse and enjoyment is part of the constitution God has given us. Even the pure unfallen Adam needed a help-meet for him. It is not good for man to be alone, on earth or in heaven. Sociability is of God, and will be, I believe, a new channel through which we shall enjoy Him. It is our sinfulness, and our sinfulness alone, that ever sets our love to each other and our love to God in opposition. They will be harmonised in heaven, when both the body and the soul will be pervaded, penetrated, with God, and every feeling, every affection, every thought, will be a new revelation of His glory. This, too, is implied in the promise, if we will think of it. The apostle does not say I shall ever be with the Lord, or you singly and individually, but "we." He is writing to converts, for whom he expresses the intensest affection, and to whom he says: "Ye are our glory and joy," and can the idea of their society have possibly been absent from his mind, when he wrote the words "*we* shall ever be with the Lord?"

Now keeping these ideas present in your mind so

as to bring the promise home actually to each one of us as a real true thing, carry all these associations forward to the heavenly sphere in which the apostle places them. That sphere is the Divine presence, the ineffable light and glory around the throne of God. There "we shall ever be with the Lord." Heaven will necessarily be a place, for where bodies will be, there must be a local habitation for their residence. And in the world provided for them, whether the world of woe or the world of joy, one will be filled with objects of infinite horror and suffering, and the other with objects of infinite beauty and happiness.

It is on the latter side I would fix your thoughts. For while all this follows necessarily from what the Bible tells us, it is yet very remarkable how little has been revealed about the locality of heaven. I think it is easy to understand why. For had it been otherwise, our tendency to rely upon outward things would have led us to materialise heaven altogether, to the exclusion of its higher aspect. Therefore it is that the spiritual aspect of heaven, not its material, is ever made prominent. The one thought, extending consistently throughout the New Testament, is that heaven will be where Christ is. The greatness of the crowned Jesus, alike in the dignity of His own nature and in the universal empire belonging to Him as the Messiah, compels us to associate every imaginable honour and majesty with His presence. But in the midst of all, and above all,

will be Himself, whom having not seen we love, the gracious Jesus of our earthly experience. Words can express no more, nor imagination of man soar into a higher flight, than this,—"so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Retain vividly in mind the idea to which I have endeavoured to give reality and force. This is the identity of saints on earth and in heaven; or, more widely, that ourselves now and ourselves then, whether the then will be in heaven or hell, will be the same selves. What a solemn thought it is, that we and our lives below are storing up the elements either of one or of the other! If the elements of hell, what pangs can be conceived more keen or more deathless than those of a remorseful memory? If the elements of heaven, what glory greater than the experience of the love and grace of God which pervades every step of the lives of all His saints? Are not these thoughts good for all? do they not strengthen hope and animate expectation? good especially amid the lessons of mortality God is daily teaching us. Shall we not "comfort one another with these words?"

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